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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

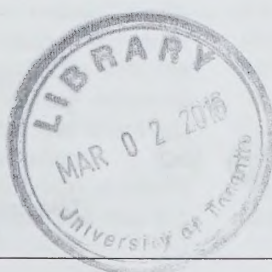
**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 23 February 2016

Mardi 23 février 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller



Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 23 February 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 23 février 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WASTE-FREE ONTARIO ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS DÉCHETS

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 18, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 151, An Act to enact the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016 and the Waste Diversion Transition Act, 2016 and to repeal the Waste Diversion Act, 2002 / Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur la récupération des ressources et l'économie circulaire et la Loi transitoire de 2016 sur le réacheminement des déchets et abrogeant la Loi de 2002 sur le réacheminement des déchets.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As always, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in this Legislature today to speak on behalf of my constituents in Oshawa and discuss Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act. I always look forward to what the government will title its next piece of legislation, and whenever I see that they have chosen something catchy like "Waste-Free Ontario Act," I know that there will be some issues with it that they are hoping we somehow might overlook. We can all agree on the sentiment of creating a waste-free Ontario—at least, I hope that we can—but we want to make sure that it is more than just a sentiment and there's actually some substance there as well.

To break things down a little further, what we're talking about today is updating an outdated system that was introduced by the Waste Diversion Act, 2002. That legislation was originally introduced with the intention to promote the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste, but as we know, progress has stalled under the current legislation as compared to other jurisdictions within Canada. The Waste Diversion Act, 2002, established a system of industry-funded organizations and stewardships with the intention of reducing waste and improving resource recovery. Unfortunately, the approach that was taken has been unsuccessful and overhaul is long overdue.

The NDP has long urged greater individual producer responsibility to replace the current system, and this bill

allows for a transition to individual producer responsibility, though unfortunately it is vague in the details.

Before the government gets ahead of itself and officially declares Ontario waste-free, I will remind the chamber that this is merely enabling legislation. The success or failure of this act will depend on policies and regulations that have not yet been disclosed. As always with this government, the devil is in the details.

Despite its title, the Waste-Free Ontario Act has no legislated goal of a waste-free Ontario, although this bill does present a vision of the draft strategy. In fact, there is no timeline for when the transition to individual producer responsibility will be completed or even for when it will begin.

Speaker, I don't want to be too cynical, as this bill does contain some positive steps forward, and on this side of the aisle we believe in giving credit where credit is due. But the government is also pretty good at congratulating itself and not quite so good at acknowledging its shortcomings, so somebody has to do it.

As I've already noted, we support building a waste-free Ontario, but we need to make sure that it is done right and it is done in a way that does not burden consumers or municipalities. That is difficult to guarantee when you're dealing with legislation that leaves more questions than answers.

There are no timelines in this bill. Nothing changes, the day after this bill passes. Industry-funded organizations will still run our waste diversion programs and could keep running them for a long time. The NDP supports this bill's promise of individual producer responsibility, but we will also seek amendments that guarantee that the government will actually follow through on their claimed goals for the bill.

I should also note that this is not the first we have heard about this change from the government. In fact, the government proposed individual producer responsibility back in 2008, and little has changed so far. Eight years seems like a long time to wait for legislation that only begins to establish a framework. But I am an optimist. We hope that the government has thought beyond the title of this legislation and is working diligently, as we speak, to address our concerns and the concerns of consumers and municipalities. If you really do intend to work toward a waste-free Ontario, then you need to get the details right from the start. I hope that you are consulting with stakeholders and experts before we end up in another misguided and poorly structured system for the next 13 years.

Enough of the platitudes; let's dive a little deeper into the legislation. On second thought, because this bill is more like a shallow pond, perhaps we will just wade in.

As I noted earlier, Bill 151 will open the door for a transition to a system of individual producer responsibility. Under individual producer responsibility, producers pay the full cost of the end-of-life management of their products and packaging, and are free to find creative ways to reduce waste. Under the existing system, however, both consumers and producers are trapped, and producers have no choice but to work with the stewardship monopolies. They have few incentives to find creative ways to reduce waste and packaging, and few incentives to improve the recoverability of their products. What happens to consumers? They get stuck with eco fees that simply pass on costs from producers without creating incentives toward better and more environmentally responsible packaging.

There are significant economic opportunities and environmental benefits from waste reduction, reuse and recycling, but progress is stalled under the current system. If and when we receive further disclosure from the government on what the actual details of this legislation will look like, we can then, hopefully, start moving toward a more results-driven approach.

What we see in the bill as it stands is that producers will be granted the flexibility to implement different solutions, as long as they fulfill provincial requirements. This means that competition and creativity will be encouraged, and we will all be better off for it. When you provide an organization with the right motivation, it is amazing what discoveries can be made. I hope that we will see, in the near future, a lot more packaging with labels that might say, "Now with 50% less plastic." A girl can dream, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, we are here talking about Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act. We are here debating waste management. We've been talking about individual producer responsibility, and I will be going in depth into what I hope will be a new waste and waste-reduction framework that will address the concerns of municipalities across the province. However, I would be remiss if I didn't point out the fact that this is a government that knows all too well about waste.

Let's imagine a true waste-free Ontario, or rather a government-waste-free Ontario. Imagine what Ontario could look like if the Liberals hadn't wasted billions on scandals. Instead of Ornge, money could have been invested in infrastructure and transportation. Imagine the strength in public services and systems we might have had if the Liberals hadn't wasted heaps of money on eHealth. The government cancelled gas plants and, as a result, is now cancelling services and cutting home care and health care. If this government was able to manage its own waste, businesses and families across the province might still be able to afford their hydro bills and keep their lights on. But alas, Mr. Speaker, this government has instead laid waste the trust and money that Ontarians have given them, and now they are recklessly selling off Hydro One.

Government waste is piling up, and Ontarians are left to clean up the mess, time and time again. I know we can't turn back the clock or reclaim the billions of dollars the government has effectively incinerated, but as we move forward, I hope this government will indeed get a handle on its own waste management.

0910

But I digress. Let's talk about this new framework. We also hope that the new framework will address some of the concerns of municipalities, who share our concerns about legislation that is full of potential but thin on the details. For example, Bill 151 does not guarantee that municipal blue box costs will go down. The provincial government has already downloaded too many costs onto municipalities, and we want to make sure that this bill does not needlessly add to the burden on those municipalities. Municipalities have been burdened enough under the current system, and we want to make sure that some relief is on the way. For too long, they have seen costs shifted in their direction. Even with Bill 151, they are still looking at a transition period that may take three to five years. Don't forget, there is no timeline included for when the transition to individual producer responsibility will be completed, or even for when it will begin.

Ultimately, whether the changes will even be effective or not will depend on the regulations to come, and this is a big concern for municipalities as well. Unlike this Liberal government, municipalities like to think long-term, and it is pretty difficult to plan when the majority of the details are still to be determined. I hope that the government has listened to the concerns presented by those municipalities. I know that I'm not the first to outline these concerns to them, so hopefully repetition will be a powerful tool.

I know that my local municipality, the region of Durham, has shared its concerns with this legislation with the government, and since this government tends to need to hear things more than once, I am pleased to reiterate some of them today. I will start by reading an excerpt of a resolution that was sent to the Premier from the regional municipality of Durham earlier this month:

"Whereas waste materials can become valuable resources and enhanced producer responsibility could provide significant environmental benefits should producers be encouraged to innovate to reduce waste, develop more easily recycled packaging, and work with municipalities to enhance and/or fund enhanced options for the collection and processing of waste materials;

"Whereas municipalities have no control over the form of municipal solid waste generated from packaging and products entering their jurisdiction, and yet municipal taxpayers continue to bear greater than 50% of the costs for the disposal and recycling of packaging and print materials that circulate within their waste streams;

"Whereas producer responsibility provides that producers bear responsibility for 100% of the costs of designated wastes and their end-of-life management and municipalities should not bear any net cost for the management of these materials which are becoming increas-

ingly complex and expensive to recycle, reclaim and/or dispose of;

"Therefore be it resolved that the regional municipality of Durham calls on the Ontario government to ensure the proposed Waste-Free Ontario Act, Bill 151, results in legislation which not only replaces the current Waste Diversion Act to ensure full producer responsibility, but that in order to ensure service levels to Ontario residents are equal to or better than existing service levels provided."

Speaker, as you can see, Durham region's concerns are pretty clear and, as I understand, are shared by municipalities across the province. Basically, they want to ensure that producers are given the proper incentives to ensure that the legislation is actually effective and that municipalities, and subsequently the taxpayers they represent, are not left as the backstop for any grey areas or gaps in legislation.

It wouldn't be the first time that this government has downloaded costs onto municipalities and left them to scramble to find the funds, so I think that their concerns are well founded. Just because you've gotten away with it in the past, though, doesn't mean that you will forever.

Durham region has also expressed concerns with some of the ambiguity in the legislation, such as the lack of a legislated role for municipalities under the proposed act, meaning that "municipalities may find themselves negotiating with producers as service providers rather than having a predetermined, regulated role." Durham stressed this concern further with the following request:

"While the province commits to continued collaboration, it is hoped the implementation of the Waste-Free Ontario Act and forthcoming detailed legislation and associated regulations will respect concerns already voiced by municipalities. A key concern highlighted is that the province needs to ensure the integrity of integrated municipal waste services and associated environmental benefits, while implementing a legislated full cost recovery framework for municipal waste services."

This further supports our primary concern with Bill 151: It is just enabling legislation, and we want the details. Now I know that this government hates details. Details usually get this government in trouble and often result in some negative media coverage, and more recently in OPP investigations. But details are important. They're how we ensure that what you're saying and what you're doing align, and what should happen and what does happen are indeed one and the same. But for now, we wait. In the meantime, we hope that our concerns are heard, as are the concerns of municipalities across Ontario and all stakeholders that will be affected by this legislation. It's not always knowing the most that's important; sometimes, it's knowing who knows the most that counts.

Just to summarize, I will include some of the concluding remarks, again from Durham region's report:

"The impact of the province's proposed legislation and regulations on municipal solid waste management program costs and property taxes remains unclear.

"Since the introduction of the existing Waste Diversion Act, 2002, municipal taxpayers have continued to fund the majority of the capital and operating costs for diversion programs (collection, processing, haulage marketing and disposal), as well as the operating and capital costs of residual garbage waste collection and disposal.

"Over the years, municipalities have created increasingly efficient waste systems that are integrated and include co-collection, commingled waste streams, long-term contracts with private sector partners, partnerships across municipal jurisdictions and vast investments in capital infrastructure.

"There are significant service and financial risks associated with potential waste program fragmentation, contractual obligations, additional administrative burden, and future direction related to existing capital assets or transfer station infrastructure. Stranded or underfunded assets and operations are a potential risk to municipalities and the municipal property taxpayers. Even under a fully funded blue box framework, costs for the integrated collection and processing of other waste streams, including organics and residual waste, would still be borne by municipalities.

"Any proposed changes to legislation must consider system-wide impacts to municipal cost structures and capital investments, including existing contracts and investments related to the current provincial funding regime, as well as other short- and long-term contracts between municipalities and the private sector related to the ongoing integrated collection, processing, haulage and disposal of municipal solid waste."

While that might be a lot to digest, we do hope that the government is listening. Municipalities such as Durham region will be among the most affected by the legislation, so we hope the government recognizes the impact this will have and takes the time to get it right the first time.

While we're pleased by the government's interest in creating a waste-free Ontario, we remain perplexed by the inconsistencies and contradictions within their policies, such as trying to limit the amount of garbage that is created and yet send the remainder to the incinerators that the Ministry of Energy has a policy of supporting. There is an incinerator in the process of opening in Durham region, in fact, and while it met all the standards set out by the government of Ontario, it did not manage to meet the increased standards as established by the regional municipality. I applaud the region of Durham for recognizing that this government's standards were too low and hope that they will take it as a sign that perhaps they need to take another look at their policies. But by all means, I'm sure that creating a truly waste-free Ontario is top priority.

Perhaps we should be accustomed to this government saying one thing today and then doing another by now, but the people of Ontario sent us here to hold this government accountable, and so we're doing just that.

In conclusion, we appreciate the government's intentions with this bill and hope to see the substance to follow. We're all on board for reducing waste in Ontario,

but we want to make sure that it's done the right way and that the burden isn't passed on to consumers or municipalities. By putting incentives in the right place, we can make some really positive changes that will benefit everyone involved. That is why the NDP has long urged the government to pursue greater individual producer responsibility to replace the current system, and we hope that the regulations that follow this bill will continue to advance this purpose. Before the government gets ahead of itself and officially declares Ontario waste-free, I will once again remind the chamber that this is merely enabling legislation and the success or failure of this act will depend on policies and regulations that have yet to be disclosed. As always with this government, the devil is in the details.

0920

Speaker, I have appreciated the opportunity to speak to this bill today, to offer my thoughts and the thoughts of those who will be affected by this bill. I look forward to supporting this legislation and hope that the regulations actually do help us to reach the goal of a waste-free Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Oshawa. The member from Oshawa said in her remarks that it's enabling legislation and that there is no substance in that. I don't agree with that. Actually, there is a lot of substance in Bill 151. If this proposed legislation is passed, it would provide Ontario households with environmental as well as economic benefits. The proposed Waste-Free Ontario Act would help us reach our greenhouse gas reduction targets and achieve the goals in our climate change strategy.

Ontario currently avoids adding 2.2 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions to our air every year through our waste diversion programs. It is like taking almost half a million cars off the road each year. With our proposed legislation, we would be able to reduce our emissions from waste further.

And, Mr. Speaker, the member from Oshawa said that there is no benefit to the municipalities. I don't agree with that. Actually, since the cost of the end-of-life product is shifting to the producer rather than the municipal taxpayer, it would improve the sustainability of municipal services. The municipalities will save more than \$100 million annually, and they will realize further additional savings as more materials are designated for new producer responsibility, such as fluorescent tubes and bulbs, bulky materials, furniture, mattresses etc.

Actually, I was reading a newsletter, the winter newsletter from the OFA. They are also supportive of the concept, and in this newsletter they said, "As a replacement to the current Waste Diversion Act, OFA supports the objective of the new act to reduce waste and the province's dependence on landfills that are typically in rural areas."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to contribute to the debate on waste-free Ontario. I appreciated the comments that we received from the member from Oshawa and how tuned in she is to her municipality. I have to agree with her that one of the concerns we've heard over and over again from stakeholders is specifically the vagueness of Bill 151. We have to ensure that municipalities across the province are at the table and are partners in how we move forward in ensuring that Ontario continues to increase its diversion rate, because I have to point out to the people listening today that unfortunately, over the last number of years, which coincide with the number of years that the Liberals have formed government, waste diversion has stalled here in Ontario. They have a dismal record and stalled out at 25%.

I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that their last attempt, Bill 91, was an absolute, complete failure. It's only by embracing the good ideas from the Ontario PC plan that they have been able to move forward with Bill 151. But we do have concerns, Speaker. We hope that we can work and drill down in committee to improve Bill 151. We want to see eco tax programs scrapped: Ontario Tire Stewardship, e-waste and also Orange Drop. We have to make sure that WDO is actually scrapped, not just slid into this new authority.

Speaking of the authority, that's where many stakeholders have concerns again. We know how this government works and we see it again in Bill 151. The minister appoints the first five members, and then his hand-picked crew selects the remaining six. Stakeholders are very nervous about that. This government has to do better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: As the member from Oshawa said, the titles of bills really kind of pre-empt what the expectations are of what the legislation might look like. When you talk about "waste-free," there is the notion that this government is on board: "100% recycling, we're not going to have any environmental issues, everything is going to be waste-free; we're on board." But really, Speaker, it's disappointing.

It really is disappointing because this bill doesn't have any meat on the bones. There's no substance to the title. We're still waiting for those regulations. We're still waiting for those policies. It leaves people hanging. It leaves stakeholders hanging. It leaves community members hanging. It leaves environmentalists hanging. It leaves municipalities hanging. What is this bill going to actually do? What kind of productive legislation is going to help the environment? We don't know what it looks like.

You're telling us to trust you, to trust this government to make this legislation effective enough that it will meet the expectations of what the bill represents: waste-free Ontario. Frankly, Speaker, there's not a lot of trust out there nowadays in this government. They're rushing legislation through all the time.

One perfect example: We had Cheri DiNovo, the member from Parkdale-High Park, talking for eight years

about post-traumatic stress disorder. What a great bill that was; what a difference that made to people. Just recently, the government took that idea and put it into legislation. Well, they need to take our ideas now, Speaker, not eight years later. When the bills are being discussed on a current basis, the ideas and the feedback need to be pertinent to the day it's happening, not eight years after the fact.

Speaker, I hope when this legislation goes to committee that this government will actually pay attention to the deputants and will implement their suggestions, so that it will become a waste-free Ontario for the legislation that they are creating today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act, 2015. Ontario is showing leadership when it comes to the environment and this is a perfect example of that, because this is about creating a waste-free Ontario. Let me tell you, here is the reality: Ontarians generate nearly 12 million tonnes of waste each year and on average each Ontarian generates 2.3 kilograms of waste materials a day.

Here's another fact: Ontario's overall waste diversion rate has remained at around 25% over the past decade. In addition, about 47% of Ontario's residential waste is diverted from disposal; however, the diversion rate in the institutional, commercial and institutional sectors continues to be low, just 13%.

So, what are we going to do? Here's what we're going to do: We have come up with a strategy for a waste-free Ontario. The proposed legislation requires the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to develop and maintain the Waste-Free Ontario: Building the Circular Economy strategy. This strategy was developed in response to what we heard from people out there and across Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I often get people coming into my constituency office who are talking about the environment and talking about the need for Ontario to have clear goals that support our circular economy. In fact, just a few weeks ago, members of my community came out and spoke to me about this. They talked about the need to take action when it comes to increased diversion and the need to measure our progress in achieving goals. That's what this proposal does.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, it's not just the people coming off the streets or the constituents. It's my friends; it's my neighbours. It's my kids—my kids sitting at the dinner table, making sure that they are directing me when I'm putting things in the trash, into the right blue box, into the green box, into the right places that it should go. So this bill is good for the economy, good for the environment and good for our children. I think it's the right thing to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Oshawa for final comments.

0930

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to respond to the thoughtful questions and comments of my colleagues around the Legislature this fine morning on waste management.

To the member from Mississauga–Brampton South: She was saying I had claimed that there is no benefit to the municipalities. Well, I didn't claim that, and I'm certainly hoping that that will not be the case. We want to see the details. We want to see the timelines. We want to see that all of the consultations that they've allegedly had with the municipality are not falling on deaf ears. We look forward to seeing the benefit to the municipalities. We look forward to finding out the details.

To the member from Huron–Bruce, who talked about listening to communities and their concerns, and the vagueness of this bill: As I had mentioned before, this is enabling legislation. As we heard from the member from London–Fanshawe, there isn't meat on the bones of this yet. But back to the member from Huron–Bruce, who had talked about the waste diversion rate that has stalled out and what makes stakeholders nervous: I think it's the same thing that we see across the province. What makes stakeholders nervous is wondering whether or not they're being heard, crossing their fingers that their input is indeed being heeded and that the legislation that they are going to have to live with and work with is going to address their concerns, and is going to actually make the world a better place—to actually see this waste-free Ontario.

My colleague from London–Fanshawe: Thank you for your comments. As you said, "waste-free" is a bit of a misnomer, because this is a bill that sort of lays out a strategy or a framework, but it doesn't give us the timelines, doesn't give us the deadlines and doesn't give us the stuff of the bill, so we don't know what it's going to look like. As she mentioned, there's not a lot of trust in this. I talked about reducing government waste, while we're talking about actual waste. I think that the trust and money of the people of Ontario have been laid to waste with reckless abandon, and that's a shame.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: I don't know if the members opposite have looked at the bill, but it's Bill 151. I suggest they take a good read of the bill. I've tried to go through it all. It is quite complex. There are over 100 pages with incredible detail. When I hear them talk about the fact that there's no meat on the bone—I mean, I just don't know whether I've seen a more complex bill.

Maybe they could say that it's an omnibus bill, but it is very detailed with a lot of direction—everything from industry stewardship to the Brewers Retail recycling program, to this authority they are creating, to the continuation of industry funding organizations. It's a very comprehensive bill that requires a lot of work. That's why I think it's important for all members to read the bill, and to look at the implications of it. Hopefully, when they come to committee, they'll be able to better understand it.

With waste reduction, the thing about it is that the members opposite always get hung up on titles. They read the title, and then they don't go into the rest of the bill. This bill deals with a subject that all of us are very involved in. It's a subject, basically, that government tries to set direction for, but it requires the co-operation of all Ontarians. It requires the co-operation of all major industries. It involves the local municipalities, first-tier and second-tier. It is something that involves everyone from Kenora to Cornwall in many different aspects, because all homes, industries and entities create waste.

The basic focus of this bill is to ensure that the waste isn't reduced downstream, but that there's an upstream strategy to reduce waste. That comes from the producers. We see too much—I'm sure you've seen it, Mr. Speaker—that the producers will constantly put forward this excessive packaging. You've seen it in everything from cereal boxes, to buying appliances, to buying furniture. The packaging is overwhelming. You get the product, and the product may be of use to you, but the packaging, what happens to it? Subsequently, that packaging creates an incredible amount of waste that has to go somewhere. This bill tries to ensure that there are strategies in place which reduce the upstream packaging that essentially costs hundreds of millions of dollars every year to deal with.

There's also a huge environmental cost of reducing the packaging, eliminating the packaging—if you don't do it. There are huge impacts in terms of the environment because some of this waste ends up in landfills—massive landfills. At one time in Toronto we used to truck our waste all the way to Dearborn, Michigan. Remember that? They were going by Chatham-Kent, I'm sure. Day after day, thousands of trucks would go with Toronto's household garbage and end up in Michigan. That's because people were really not able to develop a strategy of reducing waste here at home in the GTA to ensure we didn't export, at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars a year, garbage to Michigan. We still, unfortunately, use these landfills, and those landfills cannot continue forever.

That's why the emphasis here is to try to get people to play their role, try to get producers to play their role and be cognizant of it. For instance, the shopping that takes place: Why buy all this food in boxes, containers? Imagine all the pizza boxes. Why do you have these two-inch-thick pizza boxes? There are about a half a million pizzas sold every week in Toronto, I know, so where do these boxes go? They go into landfills.

Do we always have to have all of our morning cereal in these boxes? You've seen the boxes, Mr. Speaker. There's about half a box of Kellogg's Corn Flakes in a huge container that is almost too big. That's a perfect example of the overpackaging that takes place all the time. Overpackaging ends up in a cost to the consumers, ends up in a cost to the municipalities and ends in a cost to the environment. We must reduce packaging.

One successful recycling program that this bill reinforces is the recycling program that occurs with our

Beer Stores. If you know, Mr. Speaker, before, you could take your bottles of wine and alcohol and put them in your blue box and they would contaminate the Blue Box Program. Now people can take their used beer bottles, plus wine bottles, back to the Beer Store and get money back for them. That has proven to be very successful and it's an example of how, if people co-operate, there's a cost saving and there's an environmental saving. So that's been a great success. In fact, it's almost impossible nowadays to find an old beer can, beer bottle or wine bottle on the streets of Toronto and the GTA because there's such an effective, aggressive recycling program that is in place with the Beer Stores.

In terms of the cost of this, one of the members talked about downloading or whatever. Since this government came to power, we have uploaded over \$2 billion to the provincial government that used to be on the municipal governments. We've uploaded the cost of land ambulance, some of the welfare costs, some of the roads that were downloaded on the municipalities—we are no longer downloading highways to the municipalities—and this has been able to give municipalities more room to do what they do best without the provincial government downloading on municipalities. This has stopped.

Again, \$2 billion has been uploaded to the provincial government off the local taxpayer, to their benefit. This is something that, again, was created by the existing mayor of Ottawa. Remember, Jim Watson fought for this uploading that has been very beneficial to municipalities.

0940

This bill ultimately, as much as it deals with the municipalities and different industries, deals with the responsibility all individuals have in terms of reducing waste and ensuring that there is a comprehensive program that deals with waste. Because if you don't have this comprehensive program that's laid out in this bill, you will not reach your targets. Our targets, actually, have stalled, and that's where I think our government and other governments have not done a good enough job. Right now, we only divert about 25%—we recycle 25%. That's not good enough, Mr. Speaker. We've got to get that up there into the 50% range. It is not easy; it's easier said than done. But these are the targets that we must aggressively pursue to reduce the impact of all this waste on our economy, our environment, and on the cost that individual taxpayers have to bear.

I think it is going to be a very challenging task to implement this bill. It's not easy because, as I said, it touches on a multitude of areas which are very complex, which are very detailed, and which require the co-operation of a lot of partners, a lot of various stakeholders and individuals. So there is a great deal of work to be done. This bill sets up a very aggressive framework for reducing waste and meeting our recycling goals.

I remember when the Blue Box Program first came out. People were, in some cases, reluctant to use it. In some cases, they said, "Well, this isn't something that's of any value." But, as you know, the blue box has become very accepted, it's a norm, as is now the green bin

we have. These are programs that remind us every day that we must not use all the packaging. We must ask our vendors, when we go buy something, “Why do I need this huge box to buy my morning breakfast?” We must stop eating out of our boxes, we must stop eating out of our cans and we must stop buying things with massive packages. There’s no reason why we can’t reduce that. As consumers, we have a role to play in that.

We as consumers and as members of the Legislature, and the Ministry of the Environment, with all the partners and the business community, we all have a stake in this. It’s going to be ultimately a cost saving if we reach these recycling goals and reduce waste. It’s good for everybody, and as much as Canada does a great job and Ontario is doing a reasonable job, we have to really step up our game. We must ensure that those trucks don’t go down the 401 to London anymore. We must reduce at source as best we can, and be good environmental citizens. This bill will at least help to encourage us to get to that goal.

I’m sharing my time with the President of the Treasury Board; if she could finish off, I would appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I’m delighted to speak to this bill. When we are dealing with a bill, I always like to understand what the problem is that we’re trying to solve. The problem is very clear on this: We are wasting on average 2.3 kilograms of waste every day. That’s how much each one of us puts into landfills on average: 2.3 kilograms a day. That is just way too much, so we have to take steps to reduce the amount of waste we put into landfills.

We have to increase the diversion rate. We’ve been stalled at a 25% diversion rate for about a decade, so we need to take action to get more waste recycled, to reduce the amount of waste that’s being produced. We have a particular challenge in the ICI sector, the industrial, commercial and institutional sector. Their diversion rate is a dismal 13%, so we know there’s terrific opportunity to do more.

I have to tell you, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence talks about the trucks going down Highway 401 to London, taking Toronto’s garbage to London. I have to say, I drive down that 401 frequently—as do you, Speaker—and when I see those trucks going down to landfills in London, I can’t say I’m happy about it. So we can reduce the amount going to landfill. Our landfills have less than 20 years of life left in them. What that means is we’re going to have to take more land to create more landfill sites if we don’t take the action we must take now.

There’s also a huge opportunity here. If we just increased our diversion rate to 60%, we could create 13,000 jobs. There are jobs in waste diversion and recycling. We’re tossing out about a billion dollars a year; a billion dollars’ worth of value is being thrown into landfills when we could actually take advantage of that and put people to work. It’s good for the environment. It’s

good for the economy. It creates jobs. This is actually action that I can’t imagine anyone in this House would not support.

It’s built on a strategy that—I’m actually a bit disappointed when I hear people questioning whether we’ve listened, whether we built the foundation behind this bill. We absolutely have. One of the things I like best about this strategy is that it actually includes a set of performance measures, so we will know what is working and where improvements need to be made. The proposed legislation would require the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to prepare progress reports at least every five years, outlining what we’ve done to achieve this strategy’s goals, and then every 10 years, we would take a look at this strategy and refine it, because we know that opportunities are being created every day to reduce the amount of waste we put into landfills.

I think every one of us has had the experience where we’ve purchased something, we get it home, we unpack it, we look at the product and then we look at the packaging, and the packaging is way bigger than the product. We actually have to hold somebody accountable for that. We believe the producer should be responsible for limiting the amount of landfill waste created from their products. So that principle of producer responsibility is embedded and fundamental to this bill and to this strategy.

We are serious about reducing landfill waste. As I say, many of our communities have landfill sites. They are getting fuller. We do not want to see more good agricultural land being consumed by garbage that doesn’t need to be put into landfills. In my community, and I think in other communities as well, we’ve got some organizations that are doing fantastic work when it comes to recycling waste. We’ve got a terrific organization that puts people to work, that takes waste particularly from construction sites and sorts it, and then can resell it to people who want that kind of product. It’s really a virtuous cycle. It creates that circular economy where we truly could become a zero-waste province, and that’s the aspiration behind this piece of legislation.

I applaud the people who are activists on this front. I think a lot of us learn from our kids—certainly I’m one who learns more from my kids than I could ever teach them. My son is a particular champion of the environment. He’s actually made that his life’s work, working to create a better planet, and I really admire him for that. This is something that he’s been talking about for a long time: companies that actually create products that are designed for that full life cycle. They think about when the product has served out its useful life and how it then can become another product. It can be recycled into another useful product, sending nothing to landfill. There are carpet companies that do that; there are furniture companies that do that. There are a number of companies that actually have created jobs, have created employment, and are working to make a better planet.

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This legislation, I think, addresses a very real and immediate problem. It’s backed by a strategy that will

actually drive the change we aspire to. We will get reports back every five years to see how we are doing. We will revisit the strategy every 10 years to make sure that we're taking full advantage of the technology that's there.

The important thing is that the responsibility for waste diversion will rest with the producer of the product that we buy. The next time you purchase something and it comes in a huge box with Styrofoam and you open it all up and you find inside there's just a small, little product, you can think about how we are going to actually reduce the amount of packaging and recycle the packaging that must be there to keep that product from breaking as it works its way through the system.

I'm proud of this legislation. I think the minister has developed the right piece of legislation. I think that all of us owe it to our kids to look at this very seriously because the landfill we're creating is going to be something they're going to have to live with for a long time. Let's think of the future as we think about this bill. Let's work to make it the best it can possibly be.

Let's actually remember that we're not just going to pass this bill and it's going to be done. Every five years there will be a report back. Every 10 years we'll revise the strategy. We'll have performance metrics so we'll know if we're achieving the goals or not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to respond to the member for Eglinton–Lawrence and the Deputy Premier. She used the word—not me—“aspirational.” That's wonderful, but here we are 10 years later and she said herself that we peaked at 25% about 10 years ago and have made no advancements ever since. Here is the government, in 2016, bringing forward a new Waste Diversion Act that they're going to review in 10 years. Well, in 10 years, if we're sitting in the same numbers, where we're getting 25% of our products diverted from landfills, then we won't have accomplished anything.

I understand they're putting the onus on the manufacturers, but make no mistake about it, Speaker: Whatever manufacturers do, whatever producers do, the cost will end up being borne by the consumer. They're not going to bear the cost; the cost will be borne by the consumer. They're not in the business to lose money; they're in the business to make money, market products, and at the end of the day, the consumer will have to pay for what allows both of those things to happen.

The member for Eglinton–Lawrence brought up some examples, and there are some good examples. When I buy razor blades, I think, “My God, I've got these little razor blades and I've got enough blister packs to—” It just boggles my mind. By the time I get into the razor blades, I need a knife to hack open the package and everything. There you are: You've got these 16 razor blades with enough packaging to fill a plastic bag on its own.

But then he brings up the example of pizza boxes. That's not going to change. People are not going to be

picking up pizzas without a box. Would you like to see the mess in the front seat of your car? The boxless pizza just doesn't have a future. I say this to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence: The boxless pizza only has a future if you're baking it at home, my friend.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you for the questions and comments. The member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's always a pleasure to rise and bring the voice of my constituents from Windsor West to the debate. I just want to speak firstly to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. He spoke about excessive packaging, and we just heard from a member of the PC caucus about pizza and how we certainly aren't going to see pizzas being delivered or picked up any time soon without packaging.

But what we do see often from this government is excessive packaging of bills, omnibus bills. We find a mishmash of items or topics all rolled into one bill with a really great title. The member talked about us getting hung up on titles, but they have some grand titles that, when you go through the bill, really have nothing to do with many of the items in the bill. I think it's interesting that the member is talking about excessive packaging and reducing that, and I certainly hope we'll see that from the government side in the future when they bring their omnibus bills forward.

The President of the Treasury Board also talked about packaging, and made the comment that packaging is way bigger than the product. Again, I go back to many of the bills that the government side brings forward, their omnibus bills, where the packaging of the bill is much bigger than the content of the bill. I think we're finding that again in this bill about a waste-free Ontario.

We need to make sure that municipalities have a lot of information on how this is going to affect them. The other side talked about consultation with municipalities and how they listened, but my father-in-law has a saying: “Just because we have spoken, it doesn't mean we've communicated.” We find that often on the government side, such as with the budget. They've done budget consultations right to the beginning of February; fast-forward two weeks, and they're announcing that a week down the road they have a budget they're presenting. I'm not sure how you can put a really thoughtful, fulsome budget together, taking into consideration consultation with the people of Ontario, and do that in three weeks.

I hope that the government side will take their own advice and really start listening to the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments? I recognize the member from—

Mr. Mike Colle: York South–Weston.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): York South–Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to add my voice to the conversation this morning. The bill is entitled the Waste-Free Ontario Act, building a circular economy.

We think: What is a circular economy? We're trying to support the system to create a system where nothing is wasted and valuable materials can be recovered. Why? If we continue to produce so much waste at this rate, there will be not enough land for agriculture, and we value our farms in Ontario. We value the food that grows here locally. We value the future of our kids, of our grandkids.

There's been a lot of discussion this morning, for example, on excessive packaging, and one of my pet peeves is the way toys are packaged. There are a lot of cartons, there are all these little wires—you buy something that could be very small, but just to take it out of the package takes a lot of work. You don't have to go through all of that. The goal is to create an incentive for the producers to produce something that is less cumbersome for the consumer, and better for the environment.

Yes, we spoke about pizza boxes. Well, 45% of Ontario's waste is created by paper and by cartons. This is why we speak about pizza boxes. Why can't the producers come up with a better, maybe less thick carton? You have to incentivize the producer. I heard one member on the other side say that it is about consumer choice. But it's also about everyone's responsibility. We all have a responsibility for a better world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I was very interested in what the member from Eglinton–Lawrence as well as the Deputy Premier had to say. One comment that the President of the Treasury Board, the Deputy Premier, shared with us is that they had been wondering what the problem they're trying to solve is. That stuck with me, because industry and—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, honestly. Specifically, she said, "What the problem is that we're trying to solve," and she referenced that. I just immediately went to municipalities, I immediately went to stakeholder meetings, when we heard time and again that the problem is that this government, during its reign, has stalled waste diversion at 25%, primarily because they get too involved, there's too much red tape. As we go forward, we need to ensure that waste diversion in Ontario succeeds. How are we going to ensure that? We need to get government out of the way. We need industry to come forward and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead in terms of the circular economy that was referenced earlier.

But how are we going to get the government out of the way? Very simply, the PC plan would have the government set targets, set standards and then let industry innovate and let industry lead in terms of how we can embrace that circular notion. But it's important to recognize that, as we move forward, we need to ensure that nobody's left holding the proverbial bag. One thing that the PC Party of Ontario is committed to is that when we're talking about the blue box specifically, municipalities are at the table. In terms of determining the best way forward, we need to have our producers and municipalities, together, addressing how to move forward with the

blue box so that, again, nobody is caught bearing the cost of previous government mismanagement.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I return back to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for final comments.

Mr. Mike Colle: I think the pizza box reference is very much a symbol of all this waste and packaging. It's too bad that some people don't want to look at alternatives. But, like the pizza box and other packaging issues, there are answers. In many countries in the world, when you buy a pizza, they put it in a paper bag. They don't give you a box. I know it's going to be a nervous breakdown for some members opposite if they don't get their box, but you can actually get your pizza in a paper bag and take it home safely, so don't panic. There is an answer to your pizza box dilemma.

I want to thank the members from Renfrew, Windsor West, York South–Weston and Huron–Bruce and the Deputy Premier for their comments. I'm surprised the Conservatives always do this. This is not something that government can do to you. This is something that everybody has to do together. You can't blame the municipalities. You can't blame industries. You can't blame the householder. We all, together, have to have this imperative to reduce waste. We can only do it if everybody is part of the solution, and not pointing fingers and blaming.

I think what has happened in recent years is that we've taken it for granted, just because we see the blue box outside and the green bin. We've forgotten that we must be more aggressive in reducing waste. So maybe this is a wakeup call, this bill. I hope it is. It touches a lot of areas, and it tries to get everybody on board in terms of that goal because, eventually, it's going to save money, and it's going to create jobs. If we sell it that way, maybe that's the way we'll get more partners on board.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I only want to say one thing about pizza boxes, and then I hope we stop talking about it. If you live in the town of Caledon, your pizza box can actually go in your green bin. It is recycled in the town of Caledon.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mine too, in Simcoe.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Okay. On that note, I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act. There is clearly a need for a new waste diversion policy in Ontario. Our province's diversion rate, as has already been mentioned by numerous speakers, has been stalled for the last number of years at 25%.

However, as I just mentioned the town of Caledon, I want to talk about some of the good things that are happening in the riding of Dufferin–Caledon regarding waste diversion. In 2013, Dufferin county's waste diversion rate was 53.7%. It was ranked third among a group of 15 similarly sized municipalities. The success that had been achieved in Dufferin county is due in large part by the program that has been instituted, which of course we all recognize as the Blue Box Program.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize my former boss and federal counterpart MP David Tilson, who, throughout his career when he was a municipal representative, was one of the original founders of the Blue Box Program in Orangeville.

In addition, I want to acknowledge the great work at Blue Mountain Plastics, located in my riding in the town of Shelburne. Blue Mountain Plastics is a state-of-the-art plastics recycling facility that purchases mixed plastic bales and other forms of unrefined plastics from municipal recycling programs and businesses. They process these plastics and sort them by type and colour of plastic, and then produce pellets from the food-grade plastic which can be used to produce new food-grade containers and 100% recycled blue and green bottles. It's efforts like this that have gone a long way to make Dufferin-Caledon an environmental leader in the province.

Unfortunately, though, this type of success has not been achieved by the provincial numbers. When this government first came to power, our province's waste diversion rate was, as we mentioned, 25%. In 2014, they promised to increase the diversion rate to 60% by 2018. Yet somehow, we've been stuck at 25% for over a decade. It's very disappointing.

Many in the industry have long been calling for changes to our province's waste diversion policies. Unfortunately, the government has failed to answer these calls for action. Now the government has brought forward this new piece of legislation that has borrowed some of the ideas brought forward by the PC caucus in 2012. However, there are still a number of issues with Bill 151 that are not reflective of what my caucus brought forward. These problems that I will speak to in more detail later are being met with opposition from those in the industry and must be addressed if we are to make Ontario an environmental leader.

I'd like to spend some time going over some areas of concern regarding Bill 151. The second schedule of Bill 151 enacts the Waste Diversion Transition Act, which would replace the current Waste Diversion Act to facilitate the windup of existing recycling programs and industry-funded organizations such as the Ontario Electronic Stewardship, the Ontario Tire Stewardship and Stewardship Ontario.

It's important to mention here the failures of the government's Ontario Tire Stewardship program because, of course, we've all been reading about those in the news recently. Earlier this year, we learned that Ontario Tire Stewardship, whose job was supposed to be recycling the province's used tires, wasted thousands of dollars that the agency collects from car and truck drivers for a recycling fee on things like wine tastings, meals at fine restaurants, boat cruises, luxury hotels and even donations to the Ontario Liberal Party. In one example, \$16,000 was spent for a three-day board meeting at the Fairmont Château Laurier in Ottawa. In light of this, auditors are investigating Ontario Tire Stewardship, and no doubt we will learn more. The money the tire stewardship collects is supposed to fund the agency's operations, not wine tours and dinners.

This government has once again proven they cannot manage the province's third-party agencies. Allowing an organization that this government created to irresponsibly waste taxpayer dollars is unacceptable. Ontarians are already struggling to pay their skyrocketing hydro bills and put food on the table; they should not be on the hook for excessive spending at OTS.

The government has a responsibility to ensure appropriate oversights so that Ontario Tire Stewardship uses these funds to stick to their mandate and keep Ontario environmentally sound. This government cannot allow this kind of unchecked spending across its agencies, boards and commissions, and should immediately be conducting cost-for-value assessments. Sadly, this government has a long track record of scandal and wasteful spending. Whether it's Ornge, eHealth, cancelled gas plants or the Sudbury by-election, the list never seems to end.

It's worrisome that under section 14 of the Waste Diversion Transition Act, it is optional for the government to wind up the government's eco tax programs such as the E-Waste Program, the Used Tires Program and the Orange Drop Program. These eco tax programs have unfairly increased costs for Ontarians while failing to make any meaningful change in the province's overall diversion rate.

The PC caucus has been clear that the government's eco tax programs must be abolished, which is why in 2012, we put forward a plan that would dismantle every single eco tax program. However, we cannot trust this government to phase out these eco tax programs when in Bill 151, it is an option. That is why it's imperative that we have a clear, legislated timeline to eliminate each of these eco tax programs. We need assurances that these eco tax programs will be eliminated now, not sometime down the road when they continue to take money away from hard-working Ontarians.

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Another area of concern I have with Bill 151 are changes made to Waste Diversion Ontario. Under part III of the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, Waste Diversion Ontario will be renamed the Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority—I guess that's the "reuse" part of reduce, reuse and recycle—and given extensive new powers and an unlimited budget. The authority would set and impose fees on brand holders to pay for its operations.

What's concerning about this new authority is that much of the mandate of the new authority will be left to regulations. Speaker, you know that I have spoken many times on my concerns with leaving so much of the detail in legislation to regulation. As I've said before, a regulation can be made within days. Three cabinet ministers have to sign it; it doesn't even have to go to the full cabinet, let alone coming to the legislative chamber, where we as legislators get an opportunity to debate it.

When I read so much of Bill 151 talking about "by regulation," "enforced through regulation," it concerns me greatly. I have seen bills change completely when the

regulations are actually put in place, and the implications without consultation, without input from legislators or stakeholders. I have a lot of concern with that authority and how much of the mandate will be left to regulation. This government continues to leave things to regulation instead of fleshing it out in legislation so that we can have a proper debate.

In addition to its vague mandate, the new authority would be given a blank cheque in terms of spending. The ministry has not provided an estimate of how much this new authority will cost Ontarians. This is concerning as it could waste millions of Ontarians' hard-earned money, considering that Waste Diversion Ontario's current budget is \$3.2 million, a \$1-million increase from what was there previously. Yet approximately a third of its budget is going to professional fees, not to actually helping improve diversion rates.

This is the same story we have heard from the government's community care access centres. In last year's auditor's report on CCACs, she found that 41% of the CCAC's \$2.4-billion budget went to administrative costs. That means almost half of the money CCACs spent did not go anywhere near front-line care.

In my office, I hear from Dufferin-Caledon residents who have been denied services or have had their services severely reduced by the Central West CCAC. I regularly raise the issue of service cuts and reductions with the minister and highlight the inability of residents to access care when they or their family members need it. While the Central West CCAC continues to claim it is forced to limit its caseload because of a lack of funds, the CEO's salary has more than doubled between 2009 and 2014 to \$271,000.

As a result of cutbacks, patients have had to make tough choices, and have had to rely on help from family members or friends for paying for additional private care. I know of several individuals who chose to move out of Dufferin-Caledon into a different part of the province where the services they needed were available through another CCAC. This is unacceptable.

Instead of giving this new authority a blank cheque, it should look at ways of utilizing the money it already has.

Also of concern is the fact that section 47 of the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act sets out to create a new force of inspectors for the new authority to enforce the requirements for brand holders, including reporting costs and recycling levels. If brand holders fail to meet these requirements, an inspector can seize documents and issue fines.

Yet the fact is that the Ministry of the Environment already has an enforcement branch whose duty it is to ensure that everyone is compliant with MOE rules. Now this government is creating yet another layer of bureaucracy and duplication of service. This is not what is needed to help improve waste diversion in Ontario.

Instead of allowing industry to find the best methods to improve waste diversion, this government is chaining them down with more layers of bureaucracy, which is only doing them a disservice. Our caucus was very clear

in 2012 that all enforcement should be managed by the Ministry of the Environment, not another authority.

I understand that my time is wrapping up. I have a number of other issues that I would like to raise regarding Bill 151. I would like to acknowledge the hard work that our critic has done. The member from Huron-Bruce has given us a lot of information, and I really appreciate her assistance on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. You will be allowed to continue debate at a more appropriate time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Since it is now 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm not sure if they're in the chamber yet, but I'd like to welcome Jeff Koller, Jodi Travers and Randy Prot from the Progressive Certified Trades Coalition here today.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure this morning to introduce, in the west members' gallery, members of the Consular Spouses Association of Toronto. Visiting us here today are Sorina Oprea, Colleen O'Dwyer, Ljiljana Milicevic, Sarla Chandriae, Margery Been, Hyacinthe Miller, Dana Smith, Zdenka Rumlova, Deniz Şahinbaş Şen, Takako Yoshimoto, Yoon Soon Huh and Carlos Espinosa.

I want to congratulate Carlos on becoming the new president of the Consular Spouses Association of Toronto and organizing today's visit. Welcome.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Victor Terreri, who is a Ryerson University student who's on placement to my office. He's studying political science at Ryerson and he is a former Ontario Hockey League hockey player.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I would like to welcome the Ontario Long Term Care Association to the House today. Please welcome Patrick McCarthy, Brent Gingerich, Colleen Laing, Lee Griffi, Bill O'Neill, Ruth McFarlane, Shirley Thomas-Weir, Adrienne Spafford and Kim Wosnick.

I would also like to remind everyone to stop by the OLTCA reception later on this afternoon between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. in the legislative dining room.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to welcome Beth Potter from the Tourist Industry Association of Ontario. Also with her this morning are Keith Simmonds, Maddie Phillips and Ian McMillan. They're having their tourism day today and I'd like to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I would like to welcome Kristyn Chambers from Durham region tourism here today with the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I would also like to welcome all of our friends from TIAO who represent the tourism industry here in Ontario: a \$28-billion sector employing

over 350,000 people. A big welcome to Terry Mundell and Beth Potter, CEO and chair of TIAO.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Would the members please join me in welcoming the family of the late Mr. Wayne Wettlaufer, MPP for Kitchener Centre during the 36th and 37th Parliaments, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery: his wife, Marilyn; daughter, Leanne Bell; and grandsons Tyler and Carter Bell. Welcome. Thank you for being with us.

WAYNE WETTLAUFER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader on a point of order.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Wayne Wettlaufer, former member for Kitchener Centre, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute. Do we agree? Agreed. Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm honoured to rise today to offer tribute to former MPP for Kitchener Centre Wayne Wettlaufer. Wayne was a proud public servant. He was proud of his heritage, proud of his community and proud to be a community leader in Kitchener.

When our community in Waterloo region learned of Wayne's passing last June, it shocked everyone. After all, he had just won a seat on regional council, continuing his record of public service. I think it was shocking for everyone, because he was such a vibrant, lively and consistent part of the fabric of community in Kitchener. It's still hard to believe that he is no longer with us. His contributions will be dearly missed.

Wayne was married to his soulmate, Marilyn, for 47 years. Together, they had a daughter, Leanne, and two grandchildren, Tyler and Carter. I know many of his family and friends have joined us here today for this tribute. Thank you for being here.

I'd like to make a few remarks about Wayne and how he represented the best of Kitchener and Waterloo region. Mr. Wettlaufer earned a degree from the University of Guelph before beginning his career in the insurance industry in the 1960s. As many of you will know, the insurance industry is a large employer in our region and many firms have headquarters there, like Manulife and Sun Life, as two examples.

Like many in Waterloo region, Wayne became part of a small business when he became a partner in the firm Wettlaufer, Collins, Rankin Insurance Brokers in 1984. His next step was into provincial politics, when he won the riding of Kitchener in 1995 and joined the PC government of Mike Harris. It's not easy to take the step into the public arena and put your name on the line, but Wayne believed that he could be a good representative, and he demonstrated that through his years of hard work here at Queen's Park.

In 1999, Wayne had a private member's bill passed into law—quite a remarkable achievement. It was an act that recognized German Pioneers Day in Ontario, the day after Thanksgiving every year. Wayne was proud of his heritage and the heritage of so many German immigrants and children of immigrants who call Waterloo region home to this day.

When he was speaking about his bill here at Queen's Park, before it became law in 2000, Wayne took great care to mention the many contributions Germans and German Canadians have made to our province and our country. He spoke about how the very first church built in Ontario was built by a German Canadian. He spoke about the waves of German immigration that have shaped the history of this province, going back to the 18th century. He spoke about the successes of German Canadians in the world of business, like J.M. Schneider meats, Bauer skates and Heintzman pianos.

I continue to look forward to participating in German Pioneers Day celebrations every year in Kitchener and Waterloo. Wayne Wettlaufer's efforts to mark this day will live on. What a wonderful legacy.

At Wayne's memorial service and visitation, it was clear to me that as people passed the display of achievements, awards and body of work, you could see that it was impressive, that Wayne lived his life with his principles at the forefront and with love in his heart for his family and his community. In many ways, his commitment to public service was a demonstration of how much he valued his life, his community, and indeed the opportunity to pay it forward. He did so with great intensity and passion. He could be a fierce and steadfast debater, especially on issues of fiscal responsibility.

When Wayne ran again in 2014, Margaret Johnston, one of his most recent running mates, said, "He was very supportive of younger politicians who stuck to their morals, even when they were on the opposite sides of issues. He admired backbone and morals ... and he also called people on it when they lacked those qualities.... He had a great sense of humour and timing."

The mayor of Kitchener, Berry Urbanovic, mentioned how successfully Wayne transitioned from partisan provincial politics to non-partisan local government, where he was dedicated to serving all citizens in his community.

At the visitation, I spoke to his wife, Marilyn, about his commitment to public service. Few people, with the exception of close friends and family, outside this House fully understand the weight of this responsibility of holding a seat in the Legislature or at a city council table or school board. But our families bear witness to it, and they often pay the price.

On behalf of New Democrats, I thank Marilyn, her entire family and friends for sharing Wayne with us and his community. He left us too soon, but his life was well lived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm very honoured, as the member of Parliament for Kitchener Centre, to offer a tribute as we recognize former member Wayne Wettlaufer, who

served in this Legislature from 1995 to 2003 in the great riding of Kitchener Centre. I, too, would like to welcome to the House today his wife, Marilyn; daughter, Leanne Bell; and grandchildren Tyler and Carter.

Wayne Wettlaufer was a loving husband and father, a proud grandparent, a dedicated legislator and very loyal to his friends. When Wayne passed away unexpectedly last year, it came as a shock to everyone who knew him.

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If you ask those people in Kitchener, they'll tell you that Wayne Wettlaufer was the quintessential political animal and fiercely proud of his reputation as a fiscal hawk. He attended the University of Guelph, earned a BA, and then set out to work in the insurance industry in Waterloo region. Wayne became the corporate marketing manager of Gore Mutual in 1980 and then four years later went on to become a partner in the firm of Wettlaufer, Collins, Rankin Insurance Brokers.

But politics called to him. In 1995, when the Common Sense Revolution swept across Ontario, Wayne found himself a part of that tide in a victorious win in Kitchener Centre.

That's when I first came to know Wayne Wettlaufer. I was anchoring and producing the weekly news and current affairs program province-wide at CTV in Kitchener. I remember that Wayne was kind, relaxed, friendly and always ready to face the cameras.

I also recall Wayne's great sense of style. He was a dapper dresser, always well-groomed and taking pride in his appearance—a real fashionista of the 1990s.

He was very proud of his German heritage. As a third-generation German Canadian, Wayne was a great champion of promoting and preserving German culture in our region. Kitchener–Waterloo is home to the largest population of people with German roots in Ontario, and as past president of the German-Canadian Congress, Wayne put forward a private member's bill to mark German Pioneers Day, which now takes place on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. He was successful in his endeavour, and every year since 2000, when the German Pioneers Day Act was passed, we mark this important event in our community with a special ceremony.

In the 2003 election, fortunes turned in Ontario. Just as the province had experienced a Conservative sweep in 1995, in 2003 Ontarians chose a Liberal government. John Milloy was elected to represent Kitchener Centre and remained in that post until he retired before the 2014 provincial election.

But Wayne Wettlaufer wasn't done. His love of politics brought him back into the limelight, and it would seem that he and I would meet again—only this time, not as politician and member of the media, but as political opponents.

I wasn't quite sure what to expect at this first encounter and, quite honestly, I was a little bit nervous. I had heard from some sources in our community that Wayne could be a formidable opponent in debates, and we faced four of them. The first one, a televised debate at our local Rogers station, was where I would first en-

counter Wayne since securing the nomination. It was Wayne who spotted me first in the lobby. He marched up with an outstretched hand, a smile on his face and a warm welcome. It was not what I was expecting, but no doubt a true testament to his core values. Wayne Wettlaufer at heart was a very kind man.

On election night, he came to our victory party and again greeted me with a warm smile and a handshake. With the TV cameras pointed at us, he offered congratulations. I said thank you and added, "Regardless of the outcome, you and I really want the same thing: We want our community to succeed." And then he leaned over and said in my ear, "Well, I guess the better man won." I laughed and thanked him, and promised that I would work hard, as he had, serving Kitchener Centre.

After the provincial vote, Wayne did not stay away from politics. He was still very much interested in serving our community and decided to vie for a position on regional council in the fall of 2014. He was successful, securing a seat. In the short seven months that he served, his colleagues on council described him as an active, positive and constructive regional councillor. It's truly unfortunate and a loss to our community that he was not able to serve longer.

Mr. Speaker, Wayne Wettlaufer was a gentleman and a selfless public servant. He was a loving husband and father. To Marilyn, Leanne, Tyler and Carter, you have a lot to be proud of. Cherish those memories. Wayne Wettlaufer has left a legacy of which to be proud, one that will not soon be forgotten.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute?

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome Wayne's family, who are here from Kitchener this morning, to join as we pay tribute to a former MPP, regional councillor, grandfather to Tyler and Carter, father to Leanne and husband to Marilyn: Mr. Wayne Wettlaufer.

Speaker, when Kitchener lost then-regional councillor Wayne Wettlaufer at the age of 71 this past June, we lost a strong voice that inspired people to stand for what they believed in, to stand for principle, a voice that reminded listeners what it sounded like when someone is motivated to serve by the strength of their belief in doing what is right.

And though it may have taken a while for Wayne to find that strong voice in a public role, it was his strident concern for the political future of Ontario ahead of the 1995 election that first drove him to public service, in an effort to stand for his principles and raise that voice on the direction of government.

After working behind the scenes for many years on Tory campaigns—a lifer conservative from the age of 12—it was his overriding concern for the then NDP government's direction that got him so fired up that a friend asked him, "Wayne, if you feel so passionate about it, then why don't you just run?" Soon after, Wayne did just that, choosing to step out of his successful career as an insurance broker to dedicate himself to public service, and to devote that passion into ousting the government and joining the Common Sense Revolution.

Ironically, it was similar concerns for the future of Ontario close to 20 years later—concerns of the impacts that yet another government was having on our province's economy—that led Wayne to again stand on principle and get back into carrying the PC flag into the provincial election of 2014. And though some may have felt his inspiration was possibly partisan-based, the fact is that to Wayne, his inspiration was drawn from caring for his area—the people and the businesses—caring enough to ensure they had a voice that would fight for what's right on their behalf.

Once in the Legislature, that voice became a common fixture in this chamber, whether it be to argue strongly on economic issues true to his conservative beliefs, or to stand for the people of Kitchener on local issues unique to our area of the province, or to just chat up members of all parties. His voice was heard.

While it wasn't always easy—it wasn't often easy—and while the successes were tempered by defeats, his wife, Marilyn, tells us that Wayne never came home with his head hung low. He was a fighter. He fought for what he believed in; he fought hard for it. In the end, in defeat or victory, he could always hold his head high, because he realized that when you stand on principle, you win either way.

Most who saw him in action in this House will remember Wayne as a stereotypical conservative, perhaps, passionate about his politics and his province. But on the other side of Wayne was the family side, his compassionate side: a loving grandfather, a father, and dedicated husband to his wife, Marilyn, of 47 and a half years. Together, they were inseparable.

That compassionate side was often shown when the cameras weren't on. Just last winter, Marilyn tells us, while driving down King Street on a frigid day in Kitchener, he pulled over when he saw a homeless man on the sidewalk. He pulled up, got out, and asked the man if he had any gloves. When the answer came back, "No," Wayne took off his own gloves and handed them to their new owner. When he returned to the car, he told his wife, "Well, I didn't need those gloves anyway."

It was those little things, Speaker, that said so much about the man that Wayne was, realizing that when we all look out for each other, again, we all win.

One of the biggest wins and one of Wayne's proudest accomplishments in this Legislature was his work designating German Pioneers Day in Ontario. While he was a third-generation Canadian, Wayne was also from Kitchener, formerly known as Berlin, and was very proud of his German heritage. He was the past president of the German-Canadian Congress; served on an exchange committee with German governments to discuss finance and economics, education and health; and, through his private member's bill, Bill 28, An Act to proclaim German Pioneers Day, ensured that we now recognize the efforts of our German pioneers the day after every Thanksgiving since the bill's passing. Locally, German Pioneers Day is celebrated during the largest Bavarian festival outside of Germany, Kitchener-Waterloo's Oktoberfest.

Always looking to make a difference for the people of his riding, young or old, Wayne spent his final day at the Legislature introducing a bill to recognize Amateur Baseball Month in Ontario.

But his advocacy wasn't just reserved for his German ancestry or our young ballplayers in those eight years. In between, Wayne made his mark as an active MPP, a deputy whip, a partisan with friends on both sides of the floor, and a sharp dresser who always looked to do the right thing in support of our community. Wayne was doing just that when he stood on behalf of his community members to support St. Mary's hospital in the face of a very serious concern for its future. He argued for its enduring sustainability in fulfilling vital Kitchener health care needs, and I'm happy to report that more than a decade later, the hospital stands today as a testament to the work of Wayne and his fellow St. Mary's supporters.

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Sadly, it was St. Mary's hospital where Wayne spent his final hours, leaving behind a strong legacy as an accountable representative, advocate of community engagement and principled defender of democracy. Wayne Wettlaufer is already missed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Also in the east visitors' gallery, here for the tribute, is former MPP Garfield Dunlop from Simcoe North. Welcome, and thank you for being here for the tribute.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their kind and heartfelt statements to the family. Our deepest sympathies. You will be receiving a DVD and a hard copy of Hansard of today's testimony, in kind respect and homage to Wayne. Thank you very much for being here, and I thank all members.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. Every day, the real cost of this Liberal government's scandals, waste and mismanagement is being felt by Ontario's families and seniors. Money that should be invested in front-line health care is, instead, being spent on cancelled gas plants. In order to pay for their scandals and waste, this government has cut \$815 million from physician services, 50 medical residency spots and \$50 million in seniors' physiotherapy services. These cuts mean that patients are not receiving the quality health care they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, will Thursday's budget properly fund health care in Ontario and will there be more cuts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is eager to chime in on the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

Health care is a priority for our government. It has been and will continue to be. Since 2003, hospital funding in Ontario has risen from \$11.3 billion to \$17.3

billion. That's a 53% increase. We're investing \$11 billion to expand, renew and modernize hospitals. Those are capital dollars to build up the hospital system.

We're increasing our investments in home care by 5%. Those investments will grow by over \$750 million over the next two years. Funding for community supports increased to almost \$514 million this year. That's an increase of \$41.9 million over the last year. In every aspect of health care, funding has gone up. We understand it's a priority. We will continue those increases.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, back to the Premier: In addition to the \$815 million cut from physician services, this government cut \$54 million from the health care budget last year, despite a 6% increase in the federal government's health transfer. Because of that cut and cuts to physiotherapy and eye care, Ontario patients are suffering, and it will only get worse. This Liberal government is so out of touch, they refuse to admit their cuts are forcing doctors to close practices and forcing hospitals to fire nurses.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government put patients first? Will Thursday's budget reverse the cuts to doctors, nurses and hospitals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how an increase in our budget for health care and an increase in the budget for our physicians could be somehow at all translated into the sorts of cuts that the member opposite has alluded to. In fact, with regard to our doctors, we had a year of negotiations that unfortunately led to no agreement, but we brought in an umpire, a third-party adjudicator who gave us the best recommendations and implored the OMA to accept what he viewed as a fair offer by the government at that time.

Unfortunately, the OMA did not accept the retired Judge Winkler's recommendation and we had to make some changes in order to put patients first, in order to invest an additional \$250 million in home care, in order to invest more in mental health services—\$138 million of new money over the next three years. Those are investments that are important to Ontarians. Notwithstanding that, our doctors are the best paid in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back again to the Premier: Premier, when you cut front-line health care professionals, you're cutting patients' quality and access to health care. I wish you'd get that right.

This Liberal government continues to spew out their fictional figures. The numbers just don't lie. I'll give you some: 10 nurses were cut at Almonte General Hospital; 17 nurses cut at Southlake Regional Health Centre; 20 full-time positions gone at Orillia Soldiers'; 33 job cuts at Cambridge Memorial; and 350 full-time positions gone in the riding of Nipissing at the North Bay regional hospital.

All of these cuts were done in the last year alone. Each cut translates into reduced health care for Ontario's patients. When will it stop? Why won't this government put patients first and stop and reverse the cuts?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, here are some important figures that I think the Ontario public would appreciate hearing as well. The PC government of Mike Harris fired 6,000 nurses. In fact, we know in the last election campaign that they were campaigning on eliminating 100,000 jobs in the broader public sector. That would have translated into approximately 5,000 more health care workers losing their jobs.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, the member from Simcoe—Grey should look to see that I'm standing.

Finish, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: What have we done? We've increased the number of nurses that are practising in this province by 25,000 since we came into government. We've—

Mr. Steve Clark: Cut, cut, cut.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not going to play the game of yo-yo, that when I sit down, you start. If it starts again, I'll warn the member.

Carry on.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We've increased the number of nurses working full-time in this province by 30%. We're adding 900 net new doctors to the province this year alone. And we continue to make important investments, including in home care and mental health services.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. Liberal scandal, waste and mismanagement are having a real impact on the services families deserve. During pre-budget consultations, Ken Lewenza Sr., a former union president, said the following: "Government has a role ... to provide some humanity, some moral responsibility, some ethical standards, to those that we care for.... If we can't take care of seniors and our most disabled, then the reality is, we're not meeting our moral compass." I believe he is right. If the Liberals had a moral compass, this Thursday's budget would reverse the cuts to doctors, nurses and hospitals.

Will this government stop their health care cuts and take care of seniors and our most vulnerable?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has just gone over the list of investments that we have made that have meant that there are more doctors, there are more nurses, there are more health care workers in this province by thousands than there were when we came into office. We have continued, year over year, to increase that funding.

Now, the member opposite can recite a piece of rhetoric; that doesn't make it true. The fact is that there are more health professionals. There are hospitals hiring nurses in this province. There are more doctors by the thousands than when we came into office. The member

will see in the budget on Thursday that we will continue to increase funding to health care because the need continues to increase. Will there be more home care? Absolutely. Will there be more supports for people, for seniors? Absolutely. That has been our record and that is our promise.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Again to the Premier: During those same consultations, Hank Beekhuis of the Christian Labour Association, representing workers in long-term-care homes, told us this: They had “a resident die at the hands of another resident who was not, and could not, based on staffing levels, be adequately supervised.” He said they “have had residents neglected or hurt because of this pervasive problem. It puts workers in a difficult and often unsafe situation.”

It was over 10 years ago when the coroner’s inquest into the Casa Verde murders recommended proper funding to care for long-term residents. Yet, 10 years later, patient-on-patient violence in long-term-care homes continues to rise. How many more seniors will die unnecessarily before this government properly funds our long-term-care homes?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to just say to the member opposite that I think that there is more work to be done in our long-term-care sector. I think that the acuity of the condition of seniors when they go into long-term-care homes has increased. I think that there is a need, for example, for more training for health care professionals as they deal with seniors, more of whom are dealing with dementia; as I say, there’s greater acuity. So that’s why we’ve invested \$44 million annually on the Behavioural Supports Ontario program.

On top of that, there have been billions of dollars invested in long-term care. We’ve increased long-term-care home funding to \$3.97 billion in 2015-16, from \$2.1 billion in 2003-04. That’s an 85% increase. But there’s more that we have to do, and you will see in the budget, Mr. Speaker, that we recognize that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Bill Walker: Again to the Premier: We know it’s not just seniors in long-term-care homes who are suffering because of this government’s waste and mismanagement. Rhonda Gow, a personal support worker, said this at the pre-budget hearings about the lack of safe staffing levels: There is “a vicious cycle of higher time loss due to work-related injuries and staff burnout.” Rhonda often hears from co-workers who share her worry about the impact of poor working conditions on the residents’ health and safety. But what Rhonda, Hank and Ken had to say was wasted on this government, because the reality is that the Liberals wrote their budget long before these consultations ever happened.

Can the Premier promise Rhonda, Hank and Ken that Thursday’s budget will reverse her cuts to seniors’ health care and ensure safe staffing levels across long-term-care homes?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I’m glad the member opposite raises the issue of personal support workers because I heard no support from them and no support from the third party for the increase in salaries that we put in place last year for personal support workers.

Look, Mr. Speaker, we are the government that understands that personal support workers are the backbone of home care delivery in this province. That’s why, this year, personal support workers will get—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: She’s very angry today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew: Do you realize I’m standing?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I’m sorry. I apologize.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Personal support workers will get another increase this year because we recognize how important they are to the system.

I also look to the party opposite, now that they’ve had this epiphany around precarious work, to support the work we’re doing to make sure that personal support workers don’t have the precarious work situation that they often find themselves in.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. People expect government to invest in their priorities, like health care and reducing wait times, but this government doesn’t seem to share those priorities. In fact, the Liberals have frozen hospital funding in the last four budgets, forcing hospitals to close beds and fire nurses.

The people of Ontario want good, high-quality health care in their community. They deserve to know if the Premier is going to continue to freeze hospitals in Thursday’s provincial budget. Will there be more cuts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care will want to weigh in on this, but as we have said repeatedly, we have consistently, year over year, increased funding to health care. The member opposite, when she sees the budget, will realize that we are continuing to put more resources in place, because we know that the needs in health care are expanding.

But here’s an issue that I think we need to look at more closely: The leader of the third party is using “hospitals” and “health care” interchangeably. The leader of the third party is suggesting that hospitals and health care are the same thing. Hospitals are a part of health care delivery. Hospitals are a very important part of the way we deliver health care in Ontario, but they are not the whole thing. So I would ask the leader of the third party if she believes that hospitals are all there is to health care in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier may say in public that she wants to protect health care, but the reality is that since the start of 2015, more than 1,200 nurses have

been handed a pink slip by this Liberal government. No matter what rhetoric this Premier wants to spread, the reality is hospitals have been frozen, nurses are being fired and patients are not getting—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Come to order, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, please.

I'll use this moment to remind all members that when questioning and answering, you're speaking to the Chair.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Patients are not getting the kind of care and the kind of response that they deserve at our hospitals. That's the bottom line.

So if this Premier is so committed to protecting health care—which hospitals are a part of, I might add—will she put an end to the front-line cuts in our health care system?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: One thing I can assure the leader of the third party is that we will not return to the days when her party was in power when they fired 3,000 nurses, when they decreased the number of nurses who were working full-time and brought in more part-time workers. Nor will we return to the years when doctors were fleeing this province because they were so disrespected by the official opposition.

Don't take the government's word for it. I know that they've refrained from looking at the facts and the statistics, but if we look at the word of the College of Nurses of Ontario, they say that Ontario nurses reported 86,794 employment positions in the hospital sector in 2014 and that it went up by just under 1,000 to 87,513 in 2015. They need to look at the net, not the gross, not the losses, but also the additions. That is in the hospital sector alone.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week, the Premier said that Ontario is going through a health care transformation. Let's look at what that transformation has done to health care, what the Liberal transformation has done to health care: fewer nurses in our hospitals; cancelled surgeries for patients; people waiting 200 days or more for home care; and long-term-care wait-lists that are years long. That is not transformation; that is devastation for the patients of this province.

Will this Premier stop the cuts and get health care working for all Ontarians, or will we see more hospital budgets frozen and front-line health care cuts in Thursday's budget?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Just because the parties opposite continue to use the word "cut" doesn't mean that it's true. In fact, year after year after year, our health care budget increases. Our investments in those important areas like home care are increasing year after year after year—\$250 million additional this year alone.

But here are some of the other things that we've been doing: We've been investing in mental health services, increasing with new funds—\$138 million over the next three years; we've created 82 health links to provide that wraparound, coordinated care for thousands and thousands of the most complex patients across the province; 25 new nurse-practitioner-led clinics, the first one in Sudbury, Ontario; and we invest in all of our health care providers, many, many tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands across the province, who are doing exceptional work. Our wait times are the best in the country and our outcomes are approaching the best as well.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. In the 2014 budget, the Premier quietly slipped in a reference to her plan to cut 6% from most ministries every year, including this year. Perhaps she hoped nobody would notice, but we did. That 6% will mean cuts to everything from food safety to protection of our environment.

Will the Premier continue to make things worse by cutting 6% from other programs in Thursday's budget over and above her government's cuts to education and health care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party knows full well that we continue to make investments in education and we continue to make investments in health care. I think that the last number of questions have demonstrated that those increases in health care funding have been repeated year over year, and we continue to recognize that there's an increased need in health care, whether it's in home care, whether it's in hospitals, or whether it's in mental health. Those are services that are necessary and we continue to fund those and increase funding.

The reality is that our plan is about investing in the people of this province and investing in infrastructure that is needed in every community. Yesterday I was at the ROMA/Ontario Good Roads Association meeting and I talked about the increases that we are making to the community investment fund that will allow municipalities to have more money on a formula basis to make investments in infrastructure. That's the work that we're doing across government.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Ontarians expect honesty from their government, but the Premier is planning to cut 6% out of other programs and hoping people won't notice. Cutting 6% is not investing; it's cutting. Saying you're cutting 6% from other programs covers a lot of ground, and it's not what I would call transparent.

That 6% isn't just a number. It could mean cutting support for the most vulnerable Ontarians, or reducing even further the safety of roads and commercial vehicles, or making it even more difficult for young people to get the speech therapy that they need.

Can this Premier come clean, be transparent and tell Ontarians what other services she'll be cutting in Thursday's budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I invite the leader of the third party to read the budget on Thursday so that she will understand how we are making investments across this province. She will also see that there are changes being made in the way we deliver government.

There are transformations that are happening. There's a process that the President of the Treasury Board has gone through. She has worked, ministry by ministry, looking at programs, working with the ministries to change programs where they are not delivering outcomes and to reinvest in programs that are working.

I just made an announcement this morning about \$100 million that we are putting into services and supports that will help fight violence against indigenous women and work to end the violence against indigenous women. Those are the kinds of investments that are critical.

Will there be changes? Are we changing government? Absolutely. We're not going to stay stuck in the past and never change anything—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Perhaps the Premier will understand how health care, education and other services that people rely on are eroding significantly here in Ontario under this government's watch.

Ontario's Financial Accountability Officer says that selling Hydro One will mean that the province's budget balance would be worse than it would have been without the sale, Speaker.

Before the Premier came clean with her plan to sell Hydro One, she was already planning to blindly slash 6% out of the budget of almost every ministry. The Hydro One sell-off will put Ontario in even worse financial shape. Does that mean that the cuts will be even deeper than what Ontarians are already experiencing under this Liberal government's watch?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When the budget is released on Thursday, the people of Ontario, including the leader of the third party, will have an opportunity to look at how we are making changes across government and how we are investing in the people of this province and investing in the infrastructure—"infrastructure" is a word that encompasses a lot of things, but it means roads and bridges and water systems; it means transit. Those kinds of investments lead to economic growth in the future, but they lead to job creation immediately, and that is critical to our economic stability right now in Ontario.

We're in a global and a national economy, Mr. Speaker, where it is our responsibility to take the leadership role. We have a strong, diversified economy. We have lots more to do, but we're a little bit ahead in terms of other provinces. It is our responsibility to play to our strengths, to make those investments so that we can lead the way and we can be strong in the context of the national economy.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Lorne Coe: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. It's an absolute honour and pleasure to have been elected to represent the people of Whitby-Oshawa. They've sent me to Queen's Park with a clear mandate, and they've asked me to hold the government to account for their cuts to health care in Durham region, in particular.

Under the Liberals' watch, Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences has had 56 jobs cut—56 jobs cut. They were much-needed nurse positions that have led to wait times up to a year in duration.

Will the Premier reverse the health cuts in Durham region and will she give my constituents the health care system they deserve?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. Ontario Shores provides excellent mental health services to many, many Ontarians from across this province. I know that access to mental health services is important as well to the residents of Whitby-Oshawa, and I will fight to continue to ensure that they have access to these crucial services.

But the member forgot to mention—again, the opposition talks about job loss. Often, job changes occur, and because of our relationship with organized labour, we have to lay people off, even in some circumstances when they're just moving to another part of the hospital or they're moving into another program within the hospital.

I'm sure the member opposite knows, although he didn't perhaps have time to mention, that the changes which are very well thought about at Ontario Shores also mean that 33 new positions will be created, many of those available to the individuals that he referenced.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Again to the Premier: With this government's cuts to health care, Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences is just the tip of the iceberg, isn't it?

Concerned Ontario doctors showed up in Whitby-Oshawa to send the Liberals a strong message, and we've listened. The government's cuts are forcing physicians to reduce their office hours and to lay off, or reduce staff hours. We know a family doctor in Durham region who had to reduce office hours and that has now affected 500 patients.

Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier explain to those patients why they can't get a doctor's appointment?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think they need to ask that doctor, because there's nothing that

we've done that affects access to patient care. Our doctors, apart from being the best-paid in all of Canada—we continue to invest in them.

I want to point out what's extremely important for Ontarians to know: This is about compensation for physicians only. It's not about quality or access to health care services. Physicians will continue to be compensated for every single service they provide. There are no limits to the number of patients that a physician can see. No physicians will ever be asked to work for free. There's no individual cap on what a physician can bill annually.

All of these myths that are perpetrated out there by a number of individuals bear no aspect when we're talking about the changes that have been made to continue to support our physicians and to allow us to make those investments in home care, and mental health services like Ontario Shores.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. When California launched its cap-and-trade program a few years ago, large emitters were included right away. Household fuel and gasoline were added two years later. But in Ontario, it appears we're doing it the other way around: The government has proposed that Ontario families shall start paying right away, but the large emitters will get a free pass for four years.

Why must Ontario families put their money on the table before the big emitters?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the member is getting his information from. I think he's confusing the idea of free allowances, which help industry transition. You may know that there are jurisdictions that do not have a price on carbon yet, and we have to protect our industries from those and keep them competitive.

Over 85% of industries, likely—as they were in California—will be paying, and paying at a reasonable rate, on pollution and will also benefit from dollars coming from cap-and-trade to reinvestment.

Yes, we are proceeding with an across-the-board reduction, but that money is also going back into a plethora of programs, many of them already announced in kick-start programs, helping people reduce home heating costs, helping people buy electric vehicles and helping people reduce the cost of living, which California and Quebec did not do in the first instance. We think we're ahead of the curve—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, in the minister's consultation document, there are free passes for all large industrial emitters on cap-and-trade, whether they need one or not. But all Ontario families will start paying right away, whether they can afford to or not.

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Ontarians are ready to do their part to fight climate change, but they want a system that is effective, fair and

transparent. Is the government proposing to give out free passes because its cap-and-trade policy is driven by lobbyists and special interests rather than the need to deal with climate change?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm going to try and say it again slowly.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you. I'm going to say it again slowly. The vast majority of businesses we have—we estimate that over 85% of large emitters will be paying on the same terms that they pay almost exactly in Quebec and Ontario, which, up until today, the member opposite supported. This is not surprising, Mr. Speaker. The NDP has trouble with the environment. Every time it comes to tough decisions, they get all wobbly in the knees and look for excuses not to proceed.

A price on pollution is a price on pollution, and we will have an equitable and fair distribution of the costs. But they all seem to have taken subtraction costs and never addition, because they can only talk about half the ledger. I don't know whether it's some sort of dyslexia but, quite frankly, there's a major—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, actually, start the clock. I would ask us all to elevate the debate. At any given time, members might excitedly say things that I know they don't want to say, and if there's an opportunity to withdraw, I'm going to ask that it be withdrawn.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I would withdraw. I got carried away in my rhetoric. I apologize.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The normal procedure is simply a withdrawal. I want to do it right. Just withdraw.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. As you know, Minister, many of the good people of Eglinton–Lawrence are very impressed with the changes to make local Ontario wines more available to them. They're also very interested in the accessibility to fruit wines and ciders. I know you made an important announcement with the Premier about more availability. You had a great announcement in Kawartha with Mr. Rufa and his local winery there.

What we really want to know is, how are these fruit wines and the local craft ciders especially—how are they going to get their hands on them? Where can they purchase them in a city like Toronto and make sure that the farmers and the food growers in Peterborough county and Prince Edward county have jobs and continue to expand?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Eglinton—Lawrence for this question this morning. I know he's been a tireless advocate throughout the greater Toronto area to make sure that we develop the cidery and fruit wine business of the province of Ontario.

I had the enormous privilege of being with the Premier, Minister Sousa and Mr. Bradley last Thursday when we made the announcement about extending new distribution channels for VQA wines, cider and fruit wines in the province of Ontario. It's the first big change in the distribution of alcohol in Ontario since Prohibition ended in 1926.

We're allowing, of course, cider and wine to be supplied in 450 grocery stores across the province of Ontario. This fall, 70 stores will carry Ontario cider and wines on their shelves and up to 35 grocery stores will carry fruit wines. These changes will help wineries like Kawartha Country Wines in the municipality of Trent Lakes in the wonderful county of Peterborough.

In all, these changes will help to stimulate growth in the agriculture sector—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: Through you, Mr. Speaker, as you know, Minister, people in all of Ontario, especially in the heart of Toronto—my riding—really appreciate our local Ontario wines, the VQA wines and all the wines locally. They just love them. But now, they don't quite know too much about the cideries, the cider wines and the fruit wines and how they could find out more about them, where they could purchase them, who produces these fruit wines and the ciders, and how they can be available to the local person who wants a nice glass of cider instead of beer or wine. Where can they get their cider?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Eglinton—Lawrence for his supplementary this morning.

The Ontario fruit wine sector is growing about 6% annually in Ontario. There are 40 wineries that produce fruit wines in the province of Ontario. We do know that the cider sector is one of the fastest-growing segments in our LCBO, and Ontario cider producers produced almost four million litres last year. That's a lot of support for Ontario's apple farmers. Fruit wines and ciders will be available at farmers' markets this spring.

Joseph Kennedy once said, when his son was elected president in 1960, that victory has a thousand fathers. I just want to thank the Premier this morning, the member from Dufferin—Caledon, the member from Beaches—East York, the former Minister of Agriculture Leona Dombrowsky, and a great friend of us all, Senator Bob Runciman. Collectively, we—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Jeff Leal: —to make these changes to the province of Ontario.

Introducing Ontario cider and fruit wine made with 100% Ontario fruit to grocery stores and farmers' markets will provide a great boost to the agriculture sector—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health. Last month, all three parties toured the province for our pre-budget consultations. What we heard was startling, especially regarding the cuts to health care, with nursing jobs being cut by the hundreds. We all heard horror stories about patients collapsing on their front steps after being sent home too soon, or seniors crying out of hunger because their caregiver was too overwhelmed.

These are real stories from real people, presented to our committee. It's too bad the budget was already written and none of these people's issues seem to matter to this government. They're not even concerned about the appearance of listening anymore.

My question is, why is the minister so callously ignoring the legitimate concerns of families?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. As minister and also as a health care professional, I have great sympathy for any Ontarian, and their family and their loved ones, who is facing health care challenges.

It's our obligation—it's my responsibility—to ensure to the best of my ability and this government's ability that we address in a responsible, effective and timely way, as close to home as possible, what those needs are. That is the basis for many of the changes that, on behalf of the government and as the minister, I've been implementing in the health care system in areas like home care, in areas like mental health, working with our front-line health care providers to ensure that we continue to improve the services that we provide.

I'm gratified that in many, many indicators—cancer care, for example—we're among the best in the world in terms of outcomes. For wait-lists, the time to wait for special diagnostic tests or for surgical procedures, we're the best in Canada.

Of course, there's more work to be done. That's the commitment that I've made to Ontarians: to continue to improve.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the minister: Hundreds of front-line health care and nursing jobs have been cut across the province by this Liberal government. My hometown of North Bay has been affected the most, with 350 job cuts of front-line health care workers at our hospital, including 100 nurses.

Last week, the Minister of Finance mocked our three budget requests, calling them a fiscal fantasy. So according to this government, it's a fantasy to want enough nurses to provide timely care for our seniors. It's apparently a fantasy to expect enough doctors for underserved areas of rural and northern Ontario.

My question to the minister is this: Does he agree with the Minister of Finance that having adequate staffing for Ontario patients is a fantasy?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, because of some of the changes that we've made, we've begun to address the concerns that were just raised in the supplementary.

We have made changes to our family health teams to actually direct those new physicians to those parts of the province that need to also benefit from that comprehensive model of care. We have parts of Ontario, like Toronto, for example, where we have good staffing of our family health teams, and that model is available.

But in places like northern Ontario, rural Ontario and small-town Ontario, my obligation is to ensure that those services are also provided there. We opened up a medical school in northern Ontario, which has had a tremendous impact on the availability of health care providers, including physicians, in that part of Ontario—a dramatic improvement right across the north. When the intake represents individuals from those communities, they stay in those communities. There's more work to be done, but we have to also acknowledge the success and the difference in patient care.

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SPECIAL EDUCATION

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Education. We recently learned that kids, particularly those with special needs, are being kicked out of Ontario's publicly funded schools indefinitely—some for months, some for closer to a year. Underfunding for special education resources, to the point where students with unique needs are excluded from class, is absolutely disgraceful, as if 16,000 kids on the spectrum waiting for services wasn't bad enough.

Accommodating students with special education needs should be at the forefront of this government's education plan, not an afterthought. Will the minister admit that her government's cuts to education are leaving our absolutely most vulnerable kids behind?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I do want to assure the member opposite that we're very concerned about the needs of our special education children. One of the things that happened when we did the safe schools review, back when the Premier was the Minister of Education, was that the whole matter of exclusion came up.

Just to explain—Speaker, you know, because you were in the business of principaling—one of the principal's most important roles is to ensure that all the people in the school are safe. There actually is the ability for a principal to exclude individuals from a school to ensure the safety of everyone else. We know that sometimes that is inappropriately used with special education students—and I'll be pleased to carry on with the answer after that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: The minister's misplaced priorities are leaving our most vulnerable children behind. More than \$6 million in special education funding was cut from Toronto school boards last year alone. We know that more cuts are coming in this impending budget.

The results of underfunding in education are clear: Countless educational assistants have been fired. Supports in classrooms are at an all-time low, leaving kids

with unique needs out of the classroom, with no options or timelines.

Can the minister please explain why she doesn't think that all kids in Ontario deserve a right to equal-access education?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to make it clear that, in fact, under Ontario legislation all children with special needs are entitled to an education. With exclusion, as I wanted to say, we actually changed the law so that if a parent is concerned, they have a right of appeal of that exclusion. That never existed in Ontario law before. The parent does have a right of appeal on an exclusion.

On the matter of funding, students with special education needs are receiving approximately \$2.72 billion this school year. That is an increase—not a cut—of \$225.7 million, or 9% since 2012-13, and a 68% increase, \$1.1 billion, since 2002.

FAMILY LAW

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Attorney General. Navigating the law system without the help of a qualified legal professional can be a daunting task. In the area of family law in particular, many people are accessing the family justice system without the help of a lawyer, either for reasons of cost or because they think they can manage the system on their own. In fact, your ministry estimates that as many as 57% of people in the province are currently doing so without legal assistance.

Can the Attorney General please speak to her efforts to make the family law system more accessible?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you to the member from Northumberland—Quinte West for his very, very important question. Access to justice is a great priority of mine, not just in the area of family law, but across the legal system. The honourable member is correct: Far too many Ontarians proceed in family law matters without legal representation. As the member said, nearly 60%, and in some areas 70%, of individuals and families go to court without assistance. We hope that by expanding the range of services available, more families will get access to the help they need.

To this end, we have asked the Honourable Annemarie Bonkalo, former Chief Justice of the Ontario court, to lead a review in ways to make a family system more accessible for those unable to afford a lawyer. Justice Bonkalo will consult with a wide variety of stakeholders across the legal community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I thank the Attorney General for her response. I'm pleased to hear that our government is taking steps to ensure that all citizens have access to the advice they need to properly navigate the family law system.

I also know that not everyone who needs family legal services qualifies for legal aid. Expanding the range of family legal services available will no doubt help many families in Ontario get access to that much-needed help.

Could the Attorney General elaborate on the focus of Justice Bonkalo's review in seeking to provide more accessible legal assistance in family law matters?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you very much to the MPP for this important question.

Justice Bonkalo will consult with stakeholders from across the legal community and the families they serve in asking whether paralegal or other legal service providers, such as law students or law clerks, should be allowed to handle certain family law matters. Law students, paralegals and clerks offer a wide range of legal expertise and a variety of legal services in many different areas of the law. This review will help us determine if and how it would be appropriate for them in the area of family law.

Mr. Speaker, we want Ontario families to have more choice, and we hope this consultation will help us provide more affordable access to the family law system in the province.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, last year, you and the Premier were sent a letter from a family doctor in my riding which outlined the negative impacts your government's cuts to physician services would have on patients in her group practice. In the letter, the doctor warned that, as a result of your cuts, they were considering shutting down their blood lab. As of January 1, the lab is closed.

This government's actions are resulting in cuts in essential services that residents in my riding and across Ontario rely upon. After the minister received this letter and I raised this issue with him, did the minister meet with Dr. Maag or respond to her concerns?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I'm somewhat confused by the line of questioning, because the question prior by the new member from Whitby implored us to make further investments in mental health at Ontario Shores, but then the supplementary referred to his wanting further investments for our doctors. This is the line of questioning here as well.

We are investing new dollars in mental health services, \$138 million over the next three years. We are increasing our physician services budget this year compared to last year, and we'll increase it again in the year following. But we have to make sure that we're providing the patient-centred care that Ontarians need and deserve, and that requires sometimes asking our physicians to hold the line. It requires our best-paid physicians in all of Canada to hold the line so we can invest in home care, in mental health services, in all of those services that Ontarians hold dear when they do face those health challenges and need our help.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I don't know what's so hard to understand. Last year, in Dufferin county, there were five labs; now there are two. A 73-year-old constituent now has to travel 30 minutes each way and wait in a line outside, in January, because the lab in her hometown has been shut down. The only remaining lab in Orangeville was closed between Christmas and New Year's. This is completely unacceptable.

Will the minister restore funding to physician services in the upcoming budget so that patients in my riding can receive the lab services they need without having to stand outside?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

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Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I find it difficult to understand. On the one hand, the member is asking us to increase our investments to community labs, and on the other hand she's asking us to give more money to physicians.

I have to reiterate what I said earlier, that physicians will continue to be compensated for every single service they provide. To ensure that we stay within our budget, which is increasing for physicians each year, we're reducing modestly the amount we pay for individual services. But there are no limits to the number of patients that a physician can see, no physicians will ever be asked to work for free, and, on average, the discount that we've applied, that modest decrease in compensation—if you were, on average, as they are, a \$368,000 physician, receiving that level of compensation from the government, this would result in that amount decreasing perhaps to about \$350,000. But there's nothing that prevents physicians from extending their hours or seeing more patients. There's no cap.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Health. Time and time again, my leader and our caucus have stood up and pointed out the reality: Hospitals in this province have been flat-lined for the past number of years and that has resulted in services being diminished in those hospitals. You continually stand in this House and say that's not the case, everything is fine, but this flies in the face of the experience that constituents across Ontario are feeling.

I have a constituent in Moonbeam, Mr. Dana MacIntyre, who needs heart surgery as a result of a condition that he suffers. He gets referred to a hospital in Hamilton, he gets there at the end of January, and the guy who's the surgeon says, "You need to get in. You need to get in quick." The problem is, he's then told, "You have to wait at least six months," because of cutbacks at the hospital, that it had to be done because of the reduction in budget when you flat-lined it.

How could it be the case that this guy has to wait six months to get surgery that is life threatening? Is that a fair way to treat this man?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Certainly it's concerning any time we hear a story, if accurate, and I only assume that it is accurate, where an individual who truly needs heart surgery on an expedited basis is unable to receive that. But allocations for surgical procedures are made through the ministry to the LHINs, to the hospitals, and we ask our hospitals to responsibly manage that budget and be

able to prioritize with the clinicians, with the clinical experts. It shouldn't be the Minister of Health or my ministry that decides who should get a procedure, when and where. We rely on those clinical experts to actually truly prioritize who needs that surgery on an urgent basis.

I have no doubt that in the vast majority, the huge majority of cases, those clinical experts do precisely that, working in concert with the hospitals, with the allocations that are provided to them that allow for the surgery to happen in a timely fashion.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, what Dana wants and what patients across this province want is that when they're sitting across from a surgeon who says, "You need surgery and you need it quickly," they know at the end of the day it's going to be done. But the way the system runs now, as a result of your flat-lining the budget in hospitals across this province, even though the doctors are saying this is surgery that needs to be done in a pressing way, it's not only been pushed back five or six months; when Dana called the hospital again on February 8, a week later, he was told that now the lineup is going to be six to nine months. Imagine what this man feels like. He's one constituent, one patient in the province of Ontario, who happens to have brought his case into my office. There are many, many more.

We need to know from you now, Minister, are you going to make sure people like this don't have to wait extraordinary amounts of time in order to be able to get surgery that is life threatening?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the supplementary. I'd be happy, on this individual case as well—which is an anomaly, because I've heard many, many cases where that prioritization does occur, where the surgery is provided on an expedited basis according to need. That's how our health care system works and the hospitals have the ability to prioritize with the clinical experts in this case.

But I'd be very interested and it would be important to me to follow up on this individual case, so I'd ask that the member and I have an opportunity to discuss that so I can find out precisely what went on in this particular circumstance.

TOURISM

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. As the member from Ottawa—Orléans, I want to take a moment to welcome Michael Crockatt to the House. Michael is the newly appointed president and chief executive of Ottawa Tourism, the second-largest regional tourism organization in Ontario and, of course, the RTO responsible for marketing the beautiful riding of Ottawa—Orléans.

Mr. Speaker, tourism is alive and well in Ottawa. We enjoy attractions like the National Gallery of Canada, the space museum and Rideau Hall. The Ottawa River features attractions like white water rafting, kayaking and cruise boat tours. We have the Calypso water park and festivals throughout the year, like Winterlude and Canada Day.

With tourism playing such an important part in my riding, I'm interested in hearing what the government has been doing to support the growth of the tourism sector in Ontario.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member for Ottawa—Orléans for this important question. Tourism impacts every single region of this beautiful province. It's a \$28-billion sector, representing 4% of our GDP, and over 350,000 jobs here in the province of Ontario are attributed back to tourism.

Today we have many members who support the tourism sector through business and working through associations represented through the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario joining us here in the Legislature. Through our efforts over the last few decades, we've continuously built tourism here in the province of Ontario. We're going to continue to build tourism in the province of Ontario. It's led to a record-breaking year for tourism here in Ontario, with the most room stays in many regions across this great province.

We'll continue to invest as a province. I'd like to thank the member again for the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. The business climate for tourism in Ontario has never been better. With the Canadian dollar attracting more tourists from the US, our biggest market, and targeted investments supporting key festivals and attractions, I am confident that this sector will expand. In fact, it is estimated that tourism in Ontario will grow from 4.2% of our economy to 9.6% by 2021.

With over 40% of the sector's jobs held by Ontarians between the ages of 15 and 24, that's good news for youth employment. The importance of tourism and of youth employment seems to be lost on the PCs. The last PC government provided less than \$63 million a year, less than half of what our government provides annually.

Through you to the minister: What's the next step the minister is taking to ensure that our government is supporting continued growth in our tourism industry?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Again, thank you to the member for Ottawa—Orléans, who is a huge advocate for the tourism sector in Ottawa and also throughout the province.

I had the opportunity to join the member from Kitchener this past week to talk to leaders in tourism from the region. We talked about tourism and its potential continuous growth here in the province of Ontario. We're going to have more meetings, in Toronto, Peterborough, Sudbury, Ottawa, Niagara, Pembroke, Muskoka and Hamilton, to name a few.

This is only part of how our government has continued to build a strategy so that we can continue to grow the sector here in the province of Ontario. I'm also working with the federal government. We've come up with a \$30-million fund to market Ontario and different parts of Canada to the Americans in the south so we can continue to develop and build on tourism here in Ontario.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last week, I hand-delivered a letter to the minister outlining the growing concern of doctor shortages in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Sometime over the next few years, our community stands to lose a number of family doctors to retirement. As Chatham-Kent has not been deemed a high-needs area, it is subject to the province's "one doctor in, one doctor out" policy. By trying to replace doctors one at a time, we'll always be chasing the problem. Patients fall through the cracks and are left without primary care providers for extended periods of time.

Recently, a local doctor passed away. I knew her well. She was my doctor. Her untimely death left nearly 2,800 patients without care. To the minister: Where should these patients turn?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate receiving a letter last week from the member opposite, and also the good work we've been doing together on Leamington obstetrics, to make sure that we retain the ability of women to have their births at that community hospital.

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But on this matter, there's no restriction at all on physicians coming to and practising in Chatham-Kent. Mr. Speaker, a physician can go there and start a practice under fee for service. They can go there and start a practice under a family health group. They can replace a retiring physician at a family health team. They can actually create a new family health team in Chatham-Kent under new rules that we've created. What we've done is we want the majority of those family health teams to actually be located in the high-needs areas where those family health teams currently don't exist. It's such a great model. I think it's an opportunity that all Ontarians should have. We're trying to distribute it more fairly.

There are so many modalities. They can start at a family health team as a locum. There's a long list of opportunities for physicians to come to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Minister, for that response. You mentioned Leamington. Well, guess what? I have a question about Leamington.

Once again, the future of Leamington's birthing services is in jeopardy. The search is on at Leamington District Memorial Hospital for a new ob-gyn, as its only one is set to leave for Windsor at the end of May. The clinic will stay open, but will it be staffed?

The ministry has approved \$1.2 million for the operation of the OB unit, but the chief nursing executive and vice-president of patient services, Cheryl Deter, says more is needed to run the clinic. They need an additional \$400,000. Specifically, any OB candidates who have to relocate to the area are going to want a guaranteed salary as the unit gets back on track, and they need the guarantee in writing.

To the minister: What action will the minister take to ensure birthing services stay in Leamington?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member knows this has been an absolute priority for both of us: to make sure that obstetrics is maintained. In fact, because of his hard work and my involvement and my ministry's involvement, we've created a model which brings in midwives, as well, to what's happening at Leamington hospital, to provide a holistic approach to the delivery of birthing services. We did provide an additional \$1 million in new funding in the current fiscal year to allow that transition to take place.

I know the OMA has opposed the funding—what he has asked for—but we will be going ahead to ensure that those guarantees necessary to be able to attract obstetricians to Leamington hospital do occur, notwithstanding the opposition that the OMA has provided to us doing just that.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure. Industry giants like the CEO of Ford Motor Canada have said, "Right now as the TPP stands, there will be no positive outcome for Canadian manufacturing."

In fact, the TPP is expected to put 20,000 Ontario auto jobs at risk and cost 1,500 jobs in my community of Oshawa alone. We can't afford to lose any more. These aren't just stats, Mr. Speaker; they are people, they are families.

Minister, can Ontarians expect to see a firm commitment to creating good-paying jobs in this week's budget, or will they see more of the same stretch goals that the government has become so fond of?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I welcome the voice of the member opposite in joining us as we have expressed concerns to the federal government regarding some of the rules of origin that could impact our industry and the industry as a whole. It kind of depends on where they are in the industry as to whether they're for or against the changes.

At the same time, we've expressed concern on behalf, in particular, of the auto supply parts industry to the federal government to take a very, very close look at the impacts as this moves forward.

We're concerned about the timetable compared to Ontario and US companies in terms of the rules of origin and how quickly that timetable excels, and we've expressed those concerns.

This is a trade agreement that was negotiated by the federal government without the provinces at the table, like CETA, but we'll continue to stand up for our auto sector in any way that we can.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs on a point of order.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, in the members' west gallery today, I want to introduce a good friend of mine, Patrick McCarthy, who is the CEO of Omni Health Care, which is headquartered in the city of Peterborough. We welcome him here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1155 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my profound pleasure to introduce a city councillor from the city of Ottawa who represents Osgoode ward in the great riding of Nepean—Carleton: Councillor George Darouze. We all welcome you to this Assembly, and we hope you enjoy the OGRA/ROMA conference.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Somebody who chooses to be here instead of over there? Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise today to talk about the wpd Canada wind turbine project for my riding of Simcoe—Grey that was approved just a few days ago by the Liberals. These turbines are a safety hazard for pilots and passengers using the Collingwood Regional Airport. They are located right next door.

The eight wind turbines are 500 feet in height—almost as high as the TD office tower here in downtown Toronto—and, at 2.1 nautical miles from the airport, they are a threat to pilots taking off and landing. A plane taking off will reach the first two turbines in a matter of seconds.

The environment minister says that NAV Canada didn't have any concerns about these turbines, but the pilots using the Collingwood airport certainly do. These are pilots who have flown all types of aircraft all over the world. They don't take the matter lightly, and neither should the Liberals.

The local airport board and local municipalities don't want these wind turbines. They aren't wanted for safety reasons, and they aren't wanted because they will negatively impact the economy. This includes future investment at the airport and on neighbouring lands.

Mr. Speaker, I don't understand why the government is putting the lives of people at risk. These turbines are a bad idea. I'm calling on the government once again to do the right thing and put a stop to this lunacy today before someone is killed. It's not a matter of if that will happen, Mr. Speaker; it's a matter of when.

LONDON PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I rise today to speak about something that is very important to me and to the thousands of people in my hometown.

Today, like many members, I attended the OGRA/ROMA conference with a delegation from London including our mayor and two city councillors. They spoke to me about how the city of London is entering a new chapter in our history, one that is focused on improving mobility options for residents.

For those of you who don't know, London, Ontario is the largest city in Canada without a rapid transit system. A hallmark initiative of the city of London's plan is the Shift rapid transit plan. Londoners of all stripes agree that transportation mobility is a pillar of the future success of our city.

The Shift initiative is about finding environmentally sustainable ways to move people in London faster and create a great place to live and work. It focuses on rapid transit, along with cars, buses, bikes and pedestrians, as part of a transportation system that will help our city grow and prosper, and it's about developing the foundations to make London attractive for investment.

Our mayor appeared before the legislative finance committee to share that transit use in London has nearly doubled since 1998, and continues to grow.

London is ready to put its money on the table, and voted unanimously to support this important development.

To the Minister of Transportation: The city of London needs a provincial funding partner, and we are asking if we can count on this government to support this vital transit program in the coming budget.

ROYAL VICTORIA REGIONAL HEALTH CENTRE

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: On February 11, the Royal Victoria health centre in my riding of Barrie opened its doors to welcome families and visitors 24/7 as part of its new family presence policy. This change from traditional visiting hours to open visitation is an important step forward in patient- and family-centred care at the health centre.

At RVH, family is considered part of the care team because, as president and CEO Janice Skot says, "No one knows our patients better than their loved ones."

Janice went on to say, "Making the transition to open visiting hours is the right thing to do for our patients. Every patient has a right to expect the best possible experience while at RVH."

Research shows that in addition to a positive patient experience, the presence and involvement of loved ones contributes to better care, fewer medication errors and falls, lower rates for readmission and a decrease in emergency department visits following discharge.

RVH first decided to develop a family presence policy based on the input it received from its patient family advisory council.

Former MP Ed Harper had first-hand experience with this policy. Ed's wife, Rosemary, was in the RVH for the last two months of her life, and Ed rarely left her side. Ed did what he could to help the care team, and they were great in allowing him to stay with Rosemary. It meant so

much to both of them. He knew that other patients and families could benefit from the same support.

I'm very proud to represent amazing people like these leaders from Barrie who are putting patients first.

STU SCHWARTZ

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This week, we will take time in this assembly to support anti-bullying measures. Like many of my colleagues, tomorrow I will wear pink in support. But today, I ask all members of this esteemed assembly to give thoughts and good wishes to one of Ontario's most passionate anti-bullying activists, Stuntman Stu Schwartz.

Over the years, I have worked with Stuntman Stu on a number of initiatives in Ottawa. He's effectively the most well-known Ottawa booster. He is the trainer of his son's hockey team. Stu is also a workaholic. He is a relentless community champion who attends charity functions by the dozen each week. He uses his good name and his celebrity to boost food banks, our local hospitals, and his #NoMoreBullies campaign. He's a fighter, and he has taken up the cause of Colin's Army, supporting 12-year-old Colin Gillespie in his fight against cancer.

Which is why it is so cruel that Connie's husband, and Matteo and Isabella's dad, was diagnosed this past week with leukemia. Stu has been incredible throughout this entire ordeal, documenting his chemotherapy, his newly shaved face and all of the visitors that he has been receiving at the Ottawa Hospital. He has so many fans at Majic 100 and as the official voice of the Ottawa Senators as our PA announcer. We are all with him in that journey.

Everyone in Ottawa wants to help Stu because Stu helps everyone in Ottawa, and right now he needs our support as he stands up against one of the biggest bullies of all—cancer. So, on behalf of all of his friends, fans and neighbours in Nepean–Carleton and throughout the rest of Ottawa, I want him to know that we are all part of #StuStrong and he will beat this bully, with us by his side.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Today, I rise on behalf of my community of Windsor West. This month, people living in Windsor and Essex county welcomed the announcement of 1,200 new hires at our Fiat Chrysler assembly plant, along with an additional 100 apprenticeships indentured by Chrysler Canada. I am proud to say that 10% of these apprenticeships are positions held by women. This is encouraging news for the current and future production workers and skilled tradespeople, their families, as well as the greater community, noting the spinoff jobs at the feeder plants.

It's not surprising that Fiat Chrysler would see the value of investing in Windsor with the high productivity, world-class safety standards, highly skilled workforce and dedication of the unionized production workers and skilled trades workforce at the Windsor auto plant.

What is disappointing, Speaker, is that the Premier and her Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure were quick to take the credit rather than recognize the key role those employees played in securing a new investment, which resulted in the recent hiring announcement of 1,200 jobs.

While this government applauds itself for a job well done, their freeze on hospital funding, resulting in the elimination of 169 registered nursing positions at Windsor Regional Hospital, removing care for families in their most vulnerable moments—this is what the Liberal government should take responsibility for, but, not surprisingly, they continue to deny cuts to front-line health care in Windsor and across Ontario.

Ontario families want a government that understands their priorities and gives credit where credit is due, rather than one set on playing politics.

1510

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FAIR

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: On Saturday, February 20, Yvan Baker of Etobicoke Centre and I co-hosted the 11th annual Etobicoke government and community services fair at Cloverdale Mall. This annual event offers constituents of both ridings, and those visiting from outside as well, an opportunity to learn more about the many services offered by the province of Ontario and also by various non-profit and for-profit agencies and community organizations that service Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Etobicoke Centre. This year we attracted over 3,000 visitors to the fair.

More than 120 exhibitors from government ministries and institutions, local agencies and community organizations set up at the mall to showcase what they do, connect residents with the resources that they need, and generally make us more aware of the initiatives and local activities in our community.

For me, it's a valuable time to meet with constituents, listen to their concerns and be able to refer them directly to the services that they need.

There's also fun and entertainment, from trying out the lawn bowling greens to taking in the sounds of the Etobicoke Philharmonic Orchestra and the Etobicoke Community Concert Band.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the organizations and the volunteers that worked hard on Saturday to get this information out to our community. We're already looking forward to the 2017 government and community services fair at Cloverdale Mall, and I welcome all my fellow MPPs who might wish to join us.

RURAL ONTARIO

Ms. Laurie Scott: A few weeks ago, I was invited to attend Peterborough county council to hear some of their concerns. They made it absolutely clear that life is becoming increasingly unaffordable for families in rural communities like those in Peterborough county.

Ron Gerow, mayor of Havelock-Belmont-Methuen township, said that the province is overlooking the needs of rural Ontario and that the Premier has lost her focus when it comes to rural Ontario. They deserve to be heard about how rising hydro rates are putting people into poverty, forcing businesses to downsize or close, the rising costs of policing on their small municipal budgets, and the lack of action in building new long-term-care beds to accommodate their growing senior population.

Mayor Gerow stated that the wait-list in the Peterborough area for long-term care has jumped from 950 people five years ago to 2,700 people today. Mayor Gerow's township has a spot for a new long-term-care facility to be built. He's asked the Premier to come by and see this spot. He's asked the minister responsible for long-term care to address this horrendous wait-list. There is no action. He is passionate. This is horrendous and needs to be dealt with. If this government does not deal with this, I hope that the minister from Peterborough actually goes to the Premier and demands this action now.

ErinoakKids

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to rise today and speak about the recent groundbreaking on the new Oakville ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development.

I had the pleasure of joining several of my colleagues recently to help announce this milestone redevelopment project. ErinoakKids offers a wide variety of crucial services for children and youth with a range of disabilities and special needs. From medical care to speech and autism therapy, ErinoakKids will be able to provide our communities with the services and opportunities kids and their families need. I know that in my riding of Halton, many families rely on ErinoakKids, and this redevelopment will go a long way toward improving access and delivery of services.

In fact, perhaps the best part of this announcement was hearing the kids themselves talk about the important and real impact this facility will have on their lives. It was moving to hear their personal stories.

Once completed, ErinoakKids will have new facilities, not only in Oakville, but also in Mississauga and Brampton. It's the right thing to do. This will allow them to provide better coordinated care for as many as 5,600 children and youth in my area. In fact, this project will more than double the amount of treatment and therapy space.

I'm proud to say that our government is providing 100% of the funds needed to purchase the land and build all three facilities. I'd like to congratulate the leadership of ErinoakKids for their hard work on this project and for their dedication to the families they serve.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M. John Fraser: Hier, la première ministre de l'Ontario a présenté des excuses à tous les Franco-Ontariens dont la famille et les communautés ont souffert

à cause du règlement 17. Le règlement 17 représente une période sombre de notre histoire que nous ne voulons pas voir resurgir.

En 1912, le règlement 17 a interdit l'utilisation de la langue française comme langue d'enseignement ou de communication dans les écoles primaires au-delà de la deuxième année, ce qui autorisait seulement une heure par jour pour l'enseignement du français comme sujet dans les écoles primaires. De nombreux enseignants ont résisté et ont continué d'enseigner en français malgré les fortes pénalités pour les infractions aux dispositions du règlement 17.

La communauté franco-ontarienne est fière et riche en histoire dans notre province et ceci est quelque chose qui vaut d'être célébré.

J'aimerais remercier le député de Sudbury pour avoir présenté cette résolution, ainsi que la ministre des Affaires francophones pour ses efforts inlassables pour protéger et promouvoir la culture francophone en Ontario.

Un grand merci à Denis Constantineau pour avoir soulevé cette injustice qui a été faite aux Franco-Ontariens.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated February 23, 2016, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE ET LA RESPONSABILISATION EN MATIÈRE DE MARCHÉS PUBLICS

Ms. Fife moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 167, An Act to enact the Privatizations and Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act, 2016 and to amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 167, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur la transparence et la responsabilisation en matière de privatisations et de

partenariats public-privé et modifiant la Loi de 2008 sur la négociation collective dans les collèges.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This bill increases the transparency and public accountability of the decision-making process of a public sector entity in the broader public sector that privatizes services or that uses a public-private partnership to procure goods, services or construction for a major capital project. The bill ensures that all privatizations and P3 projects above a certain threshold are assessed both on the basis of value-for-money criteria as well as broader public interest criteria.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. James J. Bradley: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding membership of a standing committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

The deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committee: that on the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, be replaced by Mr. Coe.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bradley moves that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committee: that on the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, be replaced by Mr. Coe.

Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I heard Mr. Coe say yes.

1520

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have a number of local signatures coming in, courtesy of area petitions.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician

services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I am in agreement with the sentiment of that statement, and I affix my signature.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

“Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention”—in fact, dog bites have skyrocketed since breed-specific legislation was made law;

“Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners’ Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and to instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types.”

I couldn’t agree more. I’ll add my signature to the thousands and give it to Luke to be delivered.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition for ending the vacant commercial property rebate program in the province of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the city of Toronto has established and forwarded to the province of Ontario their interest in modifying or removing the vacant commercial property tax rebate; and

“Whereas there are millions of dollars in tax revenue being lost that could alleviate problems of homelessness, food security and other local issues; and

“Whereas the tax rebate is widely acknowledged as contributing to the preponderance of empty storefronts in our community; and

“Whereas the tax rebate is widely acknowledged as contributing to the lack of interest or necessity among landlords in lowering commercial lease rates in our community; and

“Whereas there is no evidence that the rebate is being used to improve commercial properties; and

“Whereas the ultimate decision to amend or end the vacant commercial property tax rebate ultimately lies with the province of Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Minister of Finance amend the current provincial legislation in order to allow the city of Toronto to amend or remove the vacant commercial property tax rebate with the goal of encouraging landlords to actively seek tenants and stimulating the local economy.”

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I support this petition, affix my name to it, and give it to page Owen to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Cindy Forster: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that

protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I support this petition, affix my signature and will send it with page Julia.

ELDER ABUSE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas today, there are more seniors 65 and over than children under the age of 15, both in Ontario and across Canada;

“Whereas there are currently more than two million seniors aged 65 and over—approximately 15% of the population and this number is expected to double in the next 25 years;

“Whereas Elder Abuse Ontario stated that between 40,000 and 200,000 seniors living in Ontario experienced or are experiencing elder abuse;

“Whereas research showed that abuse against seniors takes many forms and is often perpetrated by family members;

“Whereas financial and emotional abuse are the most frequently reported elder abuse cases;

“Whereas current Ontario legislation incorporates the Residents’ Bill of Rights, mandates abuse prevention, investigation and reporting of seniors living in either long-term-care facilities or retirement homes;

“Whereas the majority of the seniors currently and in the future live in the community;

“Whereas Bill 148, if passed, will ensure seniors living in the community have the same protection and support as those seniors living in long-term-care facilities and retirement homes;

“Whereas Bill 148, if passed, will require regulated health professionals to report elder abuse or neglect to the public guardian and trustee office;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the members of the Ontario Legislative Assembly pass Bill 148, An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992 and the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, requiring regulated health professionals to report any reasonable suspicion that a senior living in the community is being abused or neglected to the public guardian and trustee office.”

Mr. Speaker, I support the petition. I will give my petition to page Delaney.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

“(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

“(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario.”

I support this petition, am pleased to affix my name to it, and give it to page Owen to take to the table.

MISSING PERSONS

Ms. Catherine Fife: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario does not have missing persons legislation; and

“Whereas police are not able to conduct a thorough investigation upon receipt of a missing person report where criminal activity is not considered the cause; and

“Whereas this impedes investigators in determining the status and possibly the location of missing persons; and

“Whereas this legislation exists and is effective in other provinces; and

“Whereas negotiating rights to safety that do not violate rights to privacy has been a challenge in establishing missing persons law;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We ask that the Attorney General’s office work with the office of the privacy commissioner to implement missing persons legislation that grants investigators the opportunity to apply for permissions to access information that will assist in determining the safety or whereabouts of missing persons for whom criminal activity is not considered the cause.”

We should just get this done. I will affix my signature.

REALTORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: I also have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario real estate salespeople are prevented by the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 from incorporating their businesses through a personal real estate corporation; and

“Whereas other regulated professions, including chartered accountants, lawyers, health professionals, social workers, mortgage brokers, insurance agents, architects and engineers, can all form personal corporations; and

“Whereas permitting real estate salespeople to incorporate would create jobs and increase government revenue;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Tax Fairness for Realtors Act, 2015 and give real estate professionals in Ontario the ability to form personal real estate corporations.”

1530

It’s a great idea. I attach my signature and leave it with page Erin.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

“(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

“(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario.”

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas provincial underfunding for the Toronto District School Board is estimated to exceed \$109 million this school year;

“Whereas education development charges are fees levied against developers of new residential units and used by school boards to fund growth-related education land costs;

“Whereas school boards operating below capacity are not eligible to collect education development charges and EDC revenues may only be used for the purchase and upgrading of new land;

“Whereas the TDSB urgently needs more funds to finance infrastructure requirements to accommodate new growth, and developers should be contributing to these costs;

“Whereas the TDSB could generate nearly \$300 million in EDC revenues to support essential infrastructure needs;

“Whereas the requirements of the current legislation do not allow the Toronto District School Board to collect education development charges;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the members of the Legislative Assembly amend the Education Act to allow all school boards to access education development charges revenues and to enable school boards to apply EDC funds to school capital and site-related costs.”

I agree, sign this and give it to Delaney to be delivered to the table.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This petition is for increased rights for the descendants of adoptees in the province in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas adoptees have a right to information about their biological parents; and

"Whereas there are thousands of former adoptees who have had children or grandchildren in the province of Ontario, and

"Whereas an increasing number of illnesses and conditions can be identified, managed and treated through genetic screening and better understanding of family history; and

"Whereas the descendants of adoptees currently do not have the same rights as adoptees in the province of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario amend the current provincial legislation in order to provide the descendants of adoptees the same rights to information about their biological ancestors as those available to adoptees themselves."

I agree with this, will put my name to it and give it to page Richard.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

"(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

"(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario."

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: You know, Speaker, they can heckle me all they want, but these are citizens of Ontario who are petitioning our assembly.

I'm pleased to sign this petition, and I'm going to send it to the table with page Owen, regardless of the heckles that are coming from the other side.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Where were you when we raised PSWs—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care come to order? This is very inappropriate during petitions.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

Interjections.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Speaker, the other side is still heckling even after they were told to pay attention.

I support this petition and I will send it to the table with page Tristan.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative"—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "Whereas Ontario's growing"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Just hang on a second. I did recognize the member for Dufferin-Caledon.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My apologies.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: And that would be me.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

"(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

"(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario."

I support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Dhruv to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I appreciate the opportunity to read this petition, a very important petition to the Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come"—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Eglinton-Lawrence, come to order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: —“and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care”—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The deputy House leader, come to order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: —“return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I support this petition, sign it and give it to page Delaney to deliver to the table.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: In all my years here—not as many as the member for St. Catharines. I understand the emotion that takes place in this House and affects the decorum sometimes, but to have members—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. I would ask the member to state his point of order quickly.

Mr. John Yakabuski: To have the members of the government—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO’S FIRST RESPONDERS ACT (POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER), 2016

LOI DE 2016 D’APPUI AUX PREMIERS INTERVENANTS DE L’ONTARIO (ÉTAT DE STRESS POST-TRAUMATIQUE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 22, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 163, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act with respect to posttraumatic stress disorder / Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l’assurance contre les accidents du travail et la Loi sur le ministère du Travail relativement à l’état de stress post-traumatique.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments? The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: Oh, yes. Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You’re too busy heckling.

Mr. Mike Colle: Yes, I’m sort of shocked. I can’t believe the NDP is going so far right.

But anyway, listen, this bill is about not only our first responders, who initiated this bill because of the trauma they witness on a regular basis, 24/7—our firefighters, our EMS people, our correctional services—but I think this raises awareness about the whole issue of trauma in the workplace. That’s got to be taken more seriously. I think more support has got to be given to people through the WSIB and in all workplaces so that people who, in the line of duty, are confronted with these tragic, traumatic experiences are given the support, the counselling and the emotional recognition they need so they can get back to work and perform their duties without having to go through this inquisition when something does happen, which is the way things are right now, because they have to prove that they have post-traumatic stress disorder.

1540

This is a big step forward that will enable these first responders all across our province to continue their work and get the help they need and, in many cases, the preventive measures needed so that these traumatic instances will not affect them in their work.

Mr. Speaker, these awful things happen and our first responders are there, so we need to support them when they are there. That’s what this bill does, and that’s why I’m supportive of this bill.

I appreciate the comments of the member from Welland, who put this forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments? The member—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Over here.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Rotation.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The government side will get another chance to do a question and comment, and I look forward to hearing from the member for St. Catharines at that time.

I certainly do want to respond to the member for Welland, who spoke about Bill 163 yesterday afternoon. I was in the House to hear her speech, and she spoke about the impact of these kinds of traumatic incidents on nurses, especially in emergency departments. I thought her points were very well put and very well taken. She also gave acknowledgement and credit to her colleague the member for Parkdale–High Park for the work that she has done on this issue over a number of years, and certainly we would want to acknowledge that as well. There has been a lot of work done by—if I can use her name—Cheri DiNovo, the member for Parkdale–High Park, who has worked very passionately and effectively to raise the issue of the need to respond better to first responders who are suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder.

I think it’s also appropriate to point out that our leader, the member for Simcoe North, has been a vocal advocate for this kind of legislation as well. In fact, one of the very

first questions he asked in this Legislature, after he assumed his seat in the fall, was to call upon the government to expedite the debate on Ms. DiNovo's bill. In question period, he said, "Firefighters, paramedics and police officers see things we never want to see. Post-traumatic stress disorder is real, and help needs to be immediate." He said that on September 14, 2015.

Later on that fall, in question period, he said this: "It has been 72 days since I asked the Premier to work with me and the NDP to fast-track the third party's bill that would enable faster access to PTSD support for first responders. Will the Premier bring back this bill for third reading and pass it today, not a watered-down version of a government bill? Do the right thing: Show all firefighters here today that the government stands behind them...."

I've got more quotes, Mr. Speaker. Our leader has done a lot on this issue too, and we commend him for his support for our first responders in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Welland. She spoke for 20 minutes on this important piece of legislation, and there's a major piece that she addressed that we need to be very cognizant of, because it needs to be corrected, and that is the fact that nurses are missing from this piece of legislation.

On page 4 of the bill, you have full-time and part-time volunteer firefighters—as there should be—fire investigators, police officers, members of First Nations emergency response teams, paramedics, emergency medical attendants, communications officers, workers in a correctional institute—I was very happy to see that because the mayor of Thunder Bay, in our budget consultation, called the correctional facility in Thunder Bay a rathole; that's how bad it is in Thunder Bay—workers in a place of secure custody or place of secure temporary detention. This is a good list, but it's missing nurses.

What the member from Welland addressed yesterday is that according to a 2005 national study from StatsCan, 34% of nurses surveyed reported being physically assaulted by a patient in the previous year, and 47% reported experiencing emotional abuse. For those working in psychiatry and mental health settings, 70% of nurses reported experiencing emotional abuse.

It took the member from Parkdale-High Park so long to get this government to this place. The Minister of Labour, to his credit, has crafted a piece of legislation that is comprehensive—except that it is missing a major component that needs to be fixed. We need to ensure that nurses and the rights of nurses to access post-traumatic stress resources and counselling are part of the equation. That was the major point that the member from Welland made.

I hope that the government is listening because we don't need to go around again. We don't need another committee. We don't need another working group. We know how to fix this. Let's get it done.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Because the time is limited when members are making their speeches, they don't always have time to include the quotes about the legislation. I want to help the member out with some of the quotes that I see here from different people.

Geoff MacBride, president of the Ontario Paramedic Association, says, "This is a timely and responsible decision and we applaud Minister Flynn and Minister Naqvi in supporting our community and those who continue to suffer. It is no secret that first responders have a higher incidence rate to suffer PTSD, and we must make the proper steps to prevent and treat those that need it."

The firefighters' association, OPFFA, press release says, "On February 18, the province introduced legislation that recognizes post-traumatic stress as an occupational illness among firefighters and other first responders, which will make it easier for those suffering from post-traumatic stress to access workers' compensation benefits and proper treatment. The legislation will benefit the 11,000 members of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association ... and thousands of other first responders in Canada's largest province."

The SEIU had the following to say: "Yesterday, the Ontario government introduced legislation that would acknowledge that PTSD ... is work-related. This is a significant moment for SEIU Healthcare members. If passed, this legislation would allow first responders (including SEIU Healthcare paramedics) who suffer from PTSD to be eligible for WSIB."

"SEIU Healthcare paramedics have been strategically working with our partners and the government to raise awareness for this serious issue."

I know the member didn't have enough time in her speech to include all those quotes, so I wanted to help out by being able to share with the House the quotes from independent people about this progressive piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member from Welland. You have two minutes.

Ms. Cindy Forster: First, I want to thank our first responders—police, EMS, firefighters—some of whom are with us today in the House, for the work that they do, day in and day out, to protect us. Mr. Bradley: I thank him for his comments. I've certainly heard the same from others. The members from Eglinton-Lawrence, Wellington-Halton Hills and Kitchener-Waterloo: Thank you for all your comments.

But I have also heard, since my 20-minute debate yesterday, from a number of people who have been left out. I want to start by saying the member from Parkdale-High Park has worked on this bill for eight years. The NDP has brought this bill forward five times. The original bill only included the three first responders, and that was to get this issue into the forefront. The government has now tabled the legislation. We're glad to

hear that. My comments are not to take away from anything that our first responders do.

However, I have heard from bailiffs in corrections. I have heard from probation and parole officers. I've certainly heard from nurses. And I've heard from construction workers in the last 24 hours, being that there are 80 deaths—tragic, traumatic deaths—per year in this province, a 36% increase. Those people often witness the traumatic death of somebody who falls 40 storeys here in Toronto, when they're building condos.

We need to expand this legislation. We are in no way wanting to hold it up, but certainly, when we get to committee, we want to have the opportunity to actually tell the stories of these other workers who also experience trauma, some day in and day out, such as nurses in our system, particularly in the areas of mental health and in the emergency department.

We thank the government for bringing it forward and we look forward to committee.

1550

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to start out by recognizing some very special people here with us today in the gallery. I'd like to recognize Bruce Chapman, of the PAO; Chris Hoffman, of the OPPA; Stephen Reid, with the PAO; and Ernie Thorne, with the OPFFA. Welcome to Queen's Park and thank you for being here.

Mr. Speaker, I also want you know that I'll be sharing my time today with the member for Scarborough—Agincourt, the member from Ottawa—Orléans and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

I am pleased to rise today and speak about an important issue that affects our first responders: post-traumatic stress disorder. I'm proud our government is supporting our first responders through Bill 163, the PTSD act. I know the Minister of Labour has worked tirelessly for the last year to determine the best possible ways to assist those diagnosed with PTSD.

When we are hurt or in danger, we turn to our first responders for help. They protect us, guide us and are often responsible for saving our lives. So it is only right that we should help them in return when they need it.

The Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act, if passed, will provide them with a sense of security and support. It creates a presumption that a diagnosis of PTSD is a direct result of the worker's employment. This presumption makes sure it's not the responsibility of first responders to prove their PTSD, which is something we know can lead to even further stress and delay in treatment. Instead, the changes proposed in this bill would lead to faster access to benefits through the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and proper medical care.

During my years as a journalist, I saw first-hand the harsh realities our first responders have to deal with on a daily basis, whether it's a stabbing victim, a child injured in an accident or victims of violence. Mr. Speaker, I was able to turn away, but I know our first responders were not able to turn away at times.

I have spoken with first responders in the riding of Halton about this very issue—police officers, firefighters, EMS—and they've described to me just how debilitating PTSD is and how difficult it can be to get help.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is defined as being caused by a traumatic event that is outside the normal realm of human experience. This includes assault, torture, combat, severe car accidents and so much more. These people never know what they're going to be walking into and what they may wind up seeing.

Most of us can't even imagine what it's like to experience such an event, but our first responders are faced with it on a regular basis. It could be a police officer in a life-threatening situation, a firefighter pulling people from a burning house or a 911 operator helping people through a tragic event.

We're also talking about correctional officers, who go to work every day to the highly emotionally charged and physical job of managing our prisons. In Halton, we have a large number of correctional service employees working at the Maplehurst Correctional Complex and the Vanier Centre for Women. I've seen their tears. I've heard from them first-hand just how difficult their jobs are and how quickly it can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. It can be a very challenging and emotional situation to be in. That's why I'm proud that our government is working hard to help them.

Some of the symptoms of PTSD include anxiety, depression, flashbacks and feelings of guilt. Without treatment, they can get worse over time. The amendments to Bill 163 have the ability to improve the lives of the people who have been diagnosed and of their loved ones.

Bill 163 will also help prevent first responders from getting PTSD in the first place, through an awareness campaign and research grants. If passed, the amendments will offer peace of mind for first responders in Halton and across Ontario. This is not only good for them but also for their families, for Ontario residents and our communities.

I'm proud our government is taking these necessary steps and I am confident we can all come together to ensure the passage of the Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act and help our first responders lead healthy lives. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise this afternoon to support Bill 163. I'm very pleased that some of our first responders are here today. Welcome, again.

But more importantly, before I became a member of provincial Parliament, I was a registered nurse, so this particular piece of legislation is actually, as my predecessor, Gerry Phillips, would have said, the right thing to do.

There are a couple of pieces here, for those watching at home. PTSD is a significant health risk for workers, especially front-line workers, in the workplace. I would actually call it a workplace hazard. There is enough

research out there that shows that first responders are twice as likely as the general population to develop or suffer from PTSD.

There were comments made by my colleague from Welland, who herself was a nurse before, expressing concerns about one category, nurses, not being covered in this proposed legislation, Bill 163. I would say that when this particular bill goes to committee, I would cover all health professionals, because we do have physicians working in ERs who will be suffering from PTSD. They too will be experiencing this kind of workplace-related mental health issue.

The other piece about the proposed legislation is that, if passed, it would provide comprehensive support. I know the opposition members have criticized our government with regard to taking so long for the bill to move forward. I want to remind the members opposite that the minister, under his leadership, has a comprehensive strategy, beginning with an education and awareness campaign from radio to digital media and leadership summits on particular issues dealing with PTSD. The minister is developing tool kits as a resource to help first responders deal with this thing, but also employers, as well as their colleagues and their families, because this is not just the first responders experiencing PTSD; it's the entire first responder community. As well, there will be research and grants to support this kind of research, because we know that through research we can improve care and support.

The other piece of the proposed legislation that I want to spend my limited time on—because I could spend hours talking about this proposed legislation—is section 10 of the proposed bill, specifically dealing with time limits. The proposed legislation talks about the 24-month transitional period when the legislation comes into effect, that if the first responder retires and has not yet experienced PTSD, they will be affected and will be able to benefit from this proposed legislation.

We know that first responders or any other health professionals who experience stress or mental health issues do not experience those symptoms immediately after a traumatic experience. It will take time. Through these time limits, it will allow the first responders, including—I think the member opposite mentioned correctional workers earlier. I also want to remind the members opposite that workers in correctional institutions also include those working directly in health care. There are nurses who work in correctional services who are providing assessment and treatment, monitoring, evaluating and providing medications. It is clearly defined in the proposed legislation.

The other piece of the legislation that the members opposite have not spoken about is the communication officers. When you need first responders, guess who you call. You call 911. When 911 goes through the process of answering the call, they too experience potential PTSD.

So I'm very pleased that the proposed legislation covers 12 groups. Absolutely, the comments made by the member from Welland about registered nurses—I would

say that we need to expand to physicians, nurses and those who are working in ER. They should be included in the proposed legislation.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this particular bill, Bill 163. I also want to encourage everyone in the House to move this proposed legislation to committee very soon so that we can have further discussion and enhance the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I recognize the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

1600

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This is a bill I'm very proud to see before this House. Many of us in this House served in municipal government. Some of us have been mayors. I think any of us who have been a mayor have made regular visits to hospitals when paramedics, firefighters or police officers—first responders—have been wounded or shot. The trauma on them and on their families or those who have witnessed horrific events that most of us don't see—we really remember those moments very soberingly. I remember, in my days when I was mayor of Winnipeg, the amount of violence sometimes that young men and women—sometimes older men and women who served in uniform—saw was something that I have seen people struggle with, the rest of their lives, to reconcile.

PTSD doesn't just have one victim in the person who is impacted so terribly. Again, for those of us who have been in local government and have watched families try to cope with the impact of PTSD on family—young men or women or people in their police, fire or paramedic career getting up in the middle of the night, not being able to sleep, not being able to have a functional relationship with their children—as a father and a grandfather, I can't imagine how hard it would be to deal with something knowing that I wasn't well, not having something that could be solved by surgery or taking a pill. The path to recovery would be so extraordinarily complex and personally difficult that I would often find myself uncomfortable or embarrassed by my behaviour, feeling guilty for how I responded, not being able to support my partner or loved one or have the kind of relationship that you'd want to have with your children.

There are few diseases, Mr. Speaker, that are as cruel as this to the person involved and as hard to recover from. I watch that, and I am really glad that we're taking this so seriously, because I think the other challenge here is the great collapse of services for veterans. My partner, Rick, whom I'm very proud of, served as a young man who was gay in the Canadian Armed Forces before it was legally recognized, when you would get kicked out of the armed forces. He served, knowing that, on the front lines of conflicts in the Canadian navy. I know, from his circle of friends, how many of the young men and women he served with overseas in those years had complexity in their lives because of the multiple impacts of trying to survive in a community where your relationship with the person you love, if discovered, would mean that you lose

your job. At the same time, you're supporting comrades in arms who are often wounded or are often hurt.

I'm glad that we live in a country where our human rights have advanced to where we don't have to ask people to pretend to be something they're not. Our new defence minister, I think, is a shining example of the kind of openness and the kind of celebration of human diversity that we now have.

Mr. Speaker, I represent a constituency. I would like to make this appeal to my colleagues in the House. I didn't have much luck with the former Minister of Veterans Affairs, but to the current Minister of Veterans Affairs I am writing letters. We've got hundreds of young men and women in uniform who come back with PTSD and have no residential services. If you want to meet them, you just walk from here to my home in the Distillery District and you can't help but notice.

I had a community meeting, and I had some of my residents complaining about these violent street people and hobos and bums. I talked to Brother David down at the Good Shepherd. He estimates that of the 500 regulars they have in there every day, about 360 of them are young returning vets. They're on the street, and we should be embarrassed by that. We don't have the access to veterans affairs to get the kinds of support. We don't have the specially designed programs. They're falling between the cracks.

I'm fortunate that my partner, Rick, came back from his military service having been able to cope and get the support. He works as an operating room nurse right now. I know that our nurses in Ontario are very well supported. More work has to be done there, but our nurses are very well supported. He has often commented on the difference between his time as a nurse and his time as military personnel and the kinds of challenges that we have. That's not to underestimate the challenges that nurses have. God knows, he's an operating room nurse so he deals with trauma all the time.

There is no group of folks right now within the public sector who have the impact that first responders do. I'm hoping that once we get through this, we will also be big-hearted enough to try to engage with the national government to get better solutions for vets and look at other high-impacted professions that are impacted by this.

This is such a hard thing. It's such a hard thing. In my life, I have never seen a disease more difficult to cope with than PTSD, because it is not just like you're sick and you have a condition, you have a lesion, you have cancer—something that people can understand. Those diseases evoke empathy and understanding. It's hard when you act out in a violent way, or when you or someone in the neighbourhood becomes despised because you beat your neighbour up—which has happened in my constituency—because you have a mental illness and crisis in your life, often as a result of serving your community, of being the police officer who stands between us and bullets, the firefighter who rescues us or that young man or woman overseas who is on the front lines who sees something that few people can survive emotionally or psychologically.

I hope this is the beginning. I hope we move beyond that. I hope that we also look at other professions that are engaged in this.

I want to thank all the members, because I think there are members in every party in this House who at one point, since I've sat here, have raised this issue. I hope this is something where, when we all retire from this place, we will view our support for this bill as one of the prouder moments we had.

But let's not forget that we have a lot of work, both federally and provincially and with those organizations, to do a lot more for men and women in uniform in our hospitals, on our streets and in our communities. Thank you very much, and God bless.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I know that I only have two minutes, and I want to make a few comments. I want to thank the government speakers, especially the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, for his comments. I think we can look at this bill with all-party support and look at it as a very positive step in our province. I'm speaking as someone who has a son who is a police officer in Edmonton. I know what he goes through every day that he puts the uniform on. I miss him, and I love him.

I'm glad to be able to provide some comments. I do have a letter, and I hope that at some other point I'll be able to put comments on the record as part of a longer debate. But I had a constituent who wrote to me last October who agreed that I could tell their story. I'm not going to name them, at their request. The letter they sent last October really outlined the frustrations, being a police officer for decades and the challenge they had to get their PTSD recognized. I'm just going to read you a couple of excerpts:

"I filed a WSIB application at the beginning of August, with the assistance of my doctor and my psychologist. My doctor filled out the required forms, and my psychologist sent WSIB a 30-page report outlining my PTSD diagnosis, (which included several examples of traumatic calls that have affected me), as well as a treatment plan and a back-to-work plan.

"To date, I still do not have a decision from WSIB. I have run out of sick time and have been forced to apply for employment insurance, which is less than half of my normal take-home pay."

The letter goes on and talks about the hoops and hurdles that WSIB put forward to this person. It's a terrible tragedy when someone who goes to a doctor for help and goes through a workplace injury doesn't have recognition from the government.

I support this bill. I hope to tell their story at a later date during the debate. We all need to approve this. We all need to get it forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm incredibly proud to stand here today among my colleagues to work together in a

collaborative way to see that this bill becomes a reality for so many first responders in our province who have worked so hard and have dedicated their lives to promoting and ensuring that their colleagues have this protection. I want to thank them for their efforts.

I also want to thank those who currently serve and are suffering, and who have come out bravely to share their stories. I want to recognize and acknowledge those who have suffered and have succumbed to post-traumatic stress disorder.

We think of them. I think today, with this bill and our debate—more like a conversation—we honour their memory, we honour their service and we break down those barriers.

1610

So this bill, aside from the really valuable mechanics that it will have within the WSIB system for first responders to streamline that process, to recognize and to presume that PTSD was acquired on the job, what it will do is broader than that. It breaks down barriers for those in society who struggle with mental health issues—specifically, PTSD—and now can have a broader conversation: that their Legislature, their government, is taking it seriously and that they're acknowledging that we need to support people with PTSD.

Unfortunately, Speaker, it speaks to some broader problems in the system, specifically the WSIB. There are a whole host of people that we're leaving out, many of whom wouldn't be assumed to have contracted PTSD through their normal course of work, but yet are treated very unfairly through the system. I hope that this encourages the government to take a look at it overall and to ensure that we're doing the right thing for those who suffer.

Once again, congratulations. Thank you so much for your service.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you to the Minister of Labour and to the members debating this bill in the House today.

I want to rise to speak to this legislation because I want to reiterate a very important point: that first responders and emergency personnel are a key part of what keeps us, as Ontarians, safe, and that they deserve any support that we can give them.

I have a daughter who is a paramedic. She just started out in January. She's with York region. Every day she goes out there, I have an idea of some of the things that she'll be faced with, whether it's a motor vehicle accident, whether it's an overdose. I know that those are traumatic experiences for anyone. She's also taking up nursing and she'll be graduating in June—on June 5, to be exact—and I'm very proud of that aspect, as well.

Mr. Speaker, first responders put their lives on the line for others in times of distress, and we should be able to stand up for them in their distress and take care of them, as they take care of us when we need them.

Since becoming an MPP, I've had numerous meetings with the police association, firefighters and EMS first

responders from my riding. Although they have many concerns, the most important thing they usually talk about is post-traumatic stress disorder for their members.

That is why I think it's so important that we are giving them the respect they deserve. After acknowledging the existence of PTSD, from its historical origin in war trauma to the definition today, we are finally moving to a place where the presumption will be that PTSD, when diagnosed in first responders, is the result of their employment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to respond to the speeches that were just given by the government members: the member for Halton, the member for Scarborough—Agincourt and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Clearly, I think there's an emerging consensus in this House that this bill, Bill 163, is a good bill that should pass into law. There has been a lot of credit given to a number of members who have been involved in this issue over the years: certainly the member for Parkdale—High Park. Our leader, the member for Simcoe North, the Leader of the Opposition, has been vocally in support of moving forward with this kind of legislation. But I also want to acknowledge the efforts of the member for Simcoe—Grey, who has, over the years, been very supportive of first responders in his community and across the province. He served with distinction as Leader of the Opposition—and interim leader of our party, but he was officially the Leader of the Opposition—after the last election and did an outstanding job.

I know that in his conversations with first responders last year, in particular the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, he spoke about this issue very eloquently and passionately, calling upon the provincial government to move forward quickly with legislation with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder for first responders.

Again, on all sides of the House we see a considerable amount of support for the principle of this bill, and a belief that the bill must pass. At the same time, I think there will be a number of members of this Legislature who will want to talk about the first responders in their communities and express their support for the bill, so there will be some debate on this. Of course, the normal process is the bill would go to a committee and there would be an opportunity for, at the least, clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, and perhaps some public hearings as well.

But again, I think it is appropriate to recognize the contributions of members of this House, and certainly the member for Simcoe—Grey has shown leadership on this issue and many others with respect to first responders.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the government side. You have two minutes for response.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm very pleased to hear that my colleagues from all three parties have supported Bill 163

in their comments today. I'm very, very pleased to hear that all three parties are supportive of the first responders but also, more importantly, supporting Ontarians who sacrifice their lives every day to serve Ontario. Because at the end of the day, what we do in this chamber is not just to ensure that legislation is current and progressive, but also, it has to be comprehensive.

As I said earlier, the proposed legislation, if passed—there are a number of pieces here. One is ensuring the WSIB will deal with this particular piece in making sure there are resources there, there's an educational campaign and there's research. But the other piece of the legislation, if passed, talks about working with employers. We want the employers to work with us, work with the WSIB, to find ways to prevent PTSD, because at the end of the day, how do you identify the issue if you already have it, potentially—but how do you prevent it? For those new students who are currently studying to become paramedics—as I heard from my colleague from Durham, young nurses out there, as well as those who are currently in training—how do we prevent PTSD?

We need to look at a comprehensive approach. This proposed legislation, under the leadership of the Minister of Labour, who has this proposed legislation—deal with the bill, but also all the resources that ensure their success.

The other piece is I want to the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. I heard this afternoon's debate, but I know I heard previous debate on the proposed legislation as well. Everybody in this House does support different parts of the bill. There's parts of it we need to fine-tune; that's where we go to the committee.

I want to thank all the first responders who have come forward, all the family members who have come forward, or their colleagues. At the end of the day, we're only going to get better through this kind of legislation when everybody works together. So I want to so say thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to finally have the opportunity to rise and debate a bill that will offer more support for our heroes with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Speaker, I want to take you back in time. The date was September 3, 1999. I was traveling from Chatham to Windsor, and suddenly, out of nowhere, around Manning Road, I came across fog that I had never seen in my life. It was a sheer white blanket of fog. I couldn't see 15 feet in front of me, and at that time I was travelling at about 115 kilometres per hour. According to the signs, I was over the speed limit, but on the other hand, they were going to let it go anyway; I'm sure they would have.

What I wanted to point out was suddenly, my eyes got as big as saucers. Everything seemed to slow down. Eventually, what happened was that particular day at that time was the largest vehicle accident in the history of Canadian motoring.

I recall pulling my car over to the side, getting out and rescuing a woman in the median. Neither one of us knew

where we were because the fog was so thick. We used my car as a shield for oncoming vehicles, vehicles from both sides that were coming at us.

I remember calling a local radio station to have them warn motorists of the accident that was happening—not happened. While I was on the phone, I remember the radio announcer saying, “Rick, what is that noise?” I said, “That is the sound of cars slamming into each other, behind me and in front of me.”

1620

But this isn't about me. This is about the first responders who came to that accident. I still think about it, and I think of the first responders. They were heroes that day—police, fire, EMS, citizens—heroes that day.

I couldn't get myself to go back and listen to the screams of a young girl who was pinned in a vehicle as I saw a Lovers furniture truck burning up and then gas tanks starting to pop. She died in that vehicle.

I couldn't imagine what first responders felt like having seen an individual who was pinned between two cars. They couldn't get him out of the two cars that had wedged and pinned his legs, and he went up in flames before their very eyes.

I often wonder what happened to those first responders, because those men were heroes. But you never know the lasting effect that that traumatizing incident had, not only on their life at that moment, but could perhaps still be having on their lives today, almost 16 years later. I can only hope and pray that all first responders that day were able to get the necessary help that they needed, and to realize that you're a bigger person when you're able to talk about it and get it out.

But, Speaker, I must add and say to you that when I drive in fog today, heavy fog, I get flashbacks, and I proceed with extreme caution as well.

Dealing with legislation for PTSD here in the Ontario Legislature has been a long process. I'll show you how long this process has been. I'd like to review some of the history behind the issue.

Just a few weeks ago, instead of focusing on the issue itself, the Minister of Labour decided that it was appropriate to attack the opposition for the government's slow movement on the file. To quote the minister, he said, “I will note that in the history of civilization, the PC Party has raised this issue three times.” It was a disappointingly partisan comment from the minister. I have a lot of respect for the minister; please, don't get me wrong. But this was a disappointing comment on such a crucial issue, given the fact that all three parties agree that we do need to address this problem. Worse yet, his statement wasn't even accurate. I had personally raised the issue on more than one occasion right here in question period. Surely the minister would be aware of questions on such a key issue to his portfolio.

Perhaps my memory was off, so I decided to look into some of the history on the issue. As we know, the member from Parkdale-High Park first introduced a private member's bill on PTSD way back in 2008. A good idea, Mr. Speaker, doesn't care who owns it, in my

opinion, which is why we, as official opposition and third party opposition, supported Bill 2 on PTSD and wanted it called forward.

Shortly after being elected as our new leader, and then the MPP for Simcoe North, Patrick Brown took the opportunity to call on the government to commit to passing the NDP's Bill 2. In our opinion, it was a good bill that gave first responders PTSD support. It didn't matter that a member's name from another party was on the cover. If it was missing something, as the government claimed, it could have easily been addressed in committee.

On September 14 of last year, during question period, Patrick Brown called on the government to get moving on the PTSD file and fast-track the NDP's Bill 2. No commitment was given.

Then, on October 6, I called on the government House leader, who just so happens to be the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, to call forward Bill 2. He's the one who decides which bills are brought before the committee, and he's the minister whose first responders need and deserve this help. I am obviously the critic to that, as you are as well the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

On December 2, I raised the question again: Why won't the government simply call Bill 2 forward? Why not improve it in committee?

Finally, most recently, the issue was brought up once again by our leader in two separate questions on February 16 of this year.

That's five questions raised by the official opposition alone on the topic in just part of last year and this year, which is certainly more than the misleading three times in the history of civilization claimed by the minister. That doesn't count for any statements or debate comments made by members.

To suggest that members in this House, no matter where they sit, do not care about the dangers first responders face is shameful. I understand, though, the heart of the Minister of Labour. It's a good heart, and he wants to see this passed, as we all do.

This is a non-partisan issue that clearly matters to each and every member in the House. We've all heard of emotional stories in our home ridings, and I know that we all take them to heart. Attempts to inject negativity into discussion and to try to make it artificially partisan only end up hurting the integrity of this Legislature, failing the citizens we have sworn a duty to serve.

As a deputy Speaker, I'm proud to say that I've seen many debates that bring out the best of every member in this House, where ideas and viewpoints are listened to and respected. We need to see more of that respect and less partisan games. The Legislature is at its best when we show genuine appreciation for the perspectives that members bring to the table, as we have seen through the debate on this bill.

Bill 163, at its core, is about taking action on a problem that has not been properly addressed and passed. Our first responders are struggling to maintain their mental

health and deserve more help. I want to take that one step further and say that their families want them to get that help as well. It's not just first responders who suffer but their families too, because they see a change in behaviour of their loved ones.

To understand why it's so important for us to come together and figure out a solution co-operatively, one must listen to the stories of first responders who have battled their own demons with PTSD.

OPP Sergeant Brian Knowler, who works out of the Chatham-Kent detachment—my area—has personally dealt with the issue we're discussing today, and he was kind enough to share that story with me and, more importantly, he shares that story with fellow officers. If even one person realizes that they, too, can conquer their demons after hearing some of the stories shared during the debate on this bill and others before it, that's a success.

Brian's story is ultimately a success story, but there were times when it seemed that there was no possibility of a happy ending. I'd like to take a moment and share with you and this Legislature Brian's story, and I'm going to say it in the first person because this is how he wrote it.

"In October of 2004, I was the first police officer on the scene of a fatal motor vehicle collision. The collision involved a minivan and a pickup truck. The minivan had rolled into the ditch and was almost destroyed with every piece of glass and plastic being broken out of it. The witnesses at the scene hadn't seen anyone move or climb out of it after it rolled. Based on what I was told when I arrived at the collision, things did not look good.

"When I arrived, I waded through a muddy ditch full of waist-high water to get to the van. I cut my palms and knees climbing into what was left of the vehicle and was met with the sight of a single male amongst all the debris, lying on his back with one hand out the door. He was bleeding from a severe wound to his throat and rapidly losing blood. I applied direct pressure to the wound and, in doing so, had to get almost face to face with the victim.

"When I got that close, I quickly realized that the driver, who was bleeding to death before my eyes, was a close friend from university. I began to use his name, asking him to hang on, to stick with me.

"At one point, he simply breathed his last and died in my arms as I was preparing to perform CPR. The paramedics who attended the scene ultimately did revive him, and he lived for a few days in an induced coma."

Sergeant Knowler goes on to say, "I spent the rest of the night at that scene and I also had the responsibility of telling his wife, who was just about to give birth to their son, that he had died and the circumstances surrounding it. It was the worst night of my career.

"In the days immediately following, I coped the way that many first responders cope with stress and trauma—with alcohol and a strong desire to bury the experience. I didn't get any aftercare at the time, didn't explore the experience and the feelings it created, didn't let anyone

know what I was going through. I tried with one officer, an old, crusty sergeant who was supposed to be mentoring me—his advice was simply that I should toughen up because that was life. So, I told myself it was part of the job, something that a cop should be able to deal with, and locked the demon of growing PTS away in a cage way back in my brain.

“Basically,” Sergeant Knowler went on to say, “I did everything wrong:

“—I never sought out any kind of debriefing or professional assistance;

“—I buried myself in my career, striving for promotions and accolades and seeking acceptance and redemption through success at work;

“—I systematically pushed away my family and friends, creating a bubble around myself, living with the fear, the guilt, the anger, and the despair. I cut myself off from the people who were in the best position to help me and turned to video games, the Internet and unhealthy addictions to cope;

“—At work I was cool, calm, put together. At home, I lost my temper, raised my voice, and was a less than ideal dad and husband. I equate it to masks. At work, I had one mask on that hid everything nice and neat and gave everyone the impression that I was in control. At home, my real face came out, and it was an ugly, hurtful thing. (It tears at my heart that my sons will have the memory of their dad during those years as being detached, angry and isolated. They deserved better and I have done everything I can to explain to them what PTS is and what it did to me, and to repair my relationship with them and my wife.);

“—For a while, just before I completely crashed, I turned to alcohol on a daily basis to cope. It was so much easier to feel drunk and numb than to deal with the blackness.”

Sergeant Knowler went on to say this:

“—At the end of 2011, I finally got into a spiral that ended with a complete breakdown and hitting rock bottom. I was burned out physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. I contemplated suicide twice during this time.

“It took that total collapse to show me that something was wrong and that I needed professional help. I was at a place I thought I would never be at in my life—broken, battered, scared, and completely directionless.”

Here’s what he did to begin to climb out of that pit: He decided he wanted to fight. Finally admitting that he had a problem that needed to be fixed was probably the hardest step, but the most critical one in his healing process. He began seeing an excellent psychologist who specialized in PTSD treatment for first responders and those in the military. His time with her consisted mostly of cognitive and talk therapy, but it also included writing, reflecting, and coming to terms with the burden that he had been carrying around for so long.

His experiences with her were at turns enlightening, angering, sad and rewarding. He let the walls that he had built between himself and his friends and family fall

down, which led him to start to make amends and to rebuild relationships that he’d come close to destroying. He fought the battle of workmen’s compensation and got it. It was a long and complicated battle, but when he finally saw the letter with “Claim approved” written across it, the battle became worth every minute he had put into it.

He rebuilt his reputation at work and came out of the closet about his PTS. It started with a simple e-mail to his staff in support of the release of the Ontario Ombudsman’s report on PTS in policing, but led to becoming a very vocal advocate at his workplace. He began to help guide other officers through their own struggles with trauma and rebuilding their lives.

He requested and received a transfer to a different work location where his family would be more comfortable, even though it meant stepping back in rank from staff sergeant to sergeant, taking a pay cut and a cut in responsibilities and duties. He said that that turned out to be one of the best moves he’d ever made for himself and his family.

Now, a few years later, Brian is in a very good place. He has started speaking about his experiences in training both first responders and civilians about PTS, resiliency and getting through trauma with your mind and body intact. He writes regularly on issues around first responders and psychological health that have created an audience of both uniforms and civilians.

He’s enjoying work, and even though there are still some tough days, he has found new love for his job and has renewed pride in being a cop.

Sergeant Knowler finished the account of his story with an important message to all first responders:

“What I want people to take away from my story is that there is life after a PTS diagnosis, if you’re willing to fight for it. You can continue to do the job you love, you can rebuild your ties to family and friends, and you can actually become a greater, better person through tapping into strength you never knew you had.

“You can tame your demons.”

Sergeant Knowler also described the process of getting his claim processed and ultimately approved by WSIB. That’s an important insight into what first responders are currently going through.

He went on to say that when he first put in his claim, he was assigned a caseworker who walked him through the process and was responsible for collecting his information and assessing his claim. To get to that stage, he had to give a complete breakdown of what happened the night of Mike’s death, as well as recount pretty much every traumatic incident that he had been a part of since that night. That was a very difficult process, as it essentially made him relive not only Mike’s death but all the painful, awful things he has been privy to since then. He went back through the reporting system, and when he finally started to look, Brian was amazed at how many horrible things he had seen.

Speaker, the current system is really counterproductive. The first thing that we ask first responders who are

suffering to do is to painstakingly pore over every detail of the traumatic events that they have dealt with in their careers—with caseworkers, not doctors—before getting help. That would be like going to a hospital with a broken leg, only to be told that you need to run a marathon to prove that the leg is broken and then you'll get treatment.

Given how difficult it can be to address post-traumatic stress disorder once it is full-blown, it is incredibly important for early intervention resources and programs to be in place for first responders. In 2014, Chatham-Kent police launched their peer support team, comprised of six members: four sworn officers and two civilian members. Their training dealt with real-life scenarios that officers face on a regular basis.

By the way, Speaker, to interject for just a quick moment: I will be sharing my time with the member from Wellington-Halton Hills.

For Sergeant Gabe Tetrault, an investigation involving a child had a strong impact on his behaviour: "It was two years into (it) when I realized what was bothering me about the investigation. What emotionally was troubling me about it." It was only when he spoke to a chaplain during a ride-along that he realized just how important it was to talk about such incidents. He was asked what his hardest call was. He said, "In doing that, and kind of deciphering and tearing that down, I was able to say, 'Wow, there are a few incidents I need to deal with and talk about.'" Luckily, he was able to turn this into a positive, as he has encouraged his fellow officers to break the dam of silence.

The program is partly reactive and proactive. It's reactive in that it involves debriefings. When there's an incident, the unit goes out of its way to talk to the officer within a day or two. The group focused on recognizing the signs of someone dealing with PTSD, depression and indicators that would raise flags about another officer's suffering.

Chatham-Kent police also offer a police chaplain program. I've known chaplains over the years, and they're excellent. They help our police officers, especially when they need it most. They are well aware of PTSD, and without prying, they are often able to encourage officers to open up about their experiences.

Remember, it was a chaplain who first encouraged Sergeant Tetrault to talk about his traumatic experiences. Within only a few days of the program's launch, Tetrault received two calls from staff.

My office had the opportunity to speak with Constable Brent Milne about some of the other programs that the Chatham-Kent Police Service offer. The HELP Team was established by the Chatham-Kent Police Service in 2001. Its goal is to improve the outcomes of interactions between the mentally ill and the police.

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The HELP Team consists of police officers and support staff who receive extra training to deal with the mentally ill and who are partnered with local mental health agencies and support groups. The officers work

regular patrol duties but are available to handle calls for services involving the mentally ill.

The Chatham-Kent Police Service is rolling out a Road to Mental Readiness program through the Ontario Police College. The training program, developed by the Department of National Defence, was in fact adopted by the Ontario Police College as a way to improve the performance and mental health of officers. The Road to Mental Readiness training—they call it R2MR—also reduces barriers to care and encourages early access to care.

Initially, there will be an eight-hour course for police leaders, both sworn and civilian. Sometime in the spring, Chatham-Kent Police Service plans to roll out a four-hour Road to Mental Readiness program available for all employees. The program will teach employees about caution signs for mental illness issues, including PTSD, and coping mechanisms to deal with the issues.

Constable Milne noted that it would be nice to have resources for families as well. Family members, especially spouses, are critical members of the support system of our first responders. They know them better than anyone else, and it would be helpful to have some training resources available so that they too can know the warning signs to look out for.

Ultimately, the goal is to have help available for each first responder who needs it. But to get help you have to realize that you need it and that seeking help is okay. OPP Sergeant Brian Knowler has said that it is especially important for those in positions of leadership to show the issue is being taken seriously so more individuals will step forward and seek help. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of strength. And we, as legislators, in getting this bill passed, realize that and that it must continue, as well.

I'm incredibly proud to say that there is a deep respect and understanding of the mental health of all first responders in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex.

I know many of our friends in corrections will be following this bill closely and they may be listening in on debate. After speaking to many correctional officers and staff, I've learned that they do not have access to the types of programs that many first responders do. This is in spite of the fact that in a number of studies, corrections staff are either at the top of the list or close to it when it comes to the likelihood of suffering from PTSD.

As I've noted, many police services have taken the initiative to offer support programs and resources for their officers and staff. They are to be commended for their hard work. But if you happen to work in corrections, it's a different story. What I've heard is that you can talk to this person a few times, but it's basically a counselling session. This is very important, and it's great that this service is offered, but it's not enough. Access to a psychiatrist wait-list can be up to six months to a year, depending on where you are in the province. Additionally, those who eventually get an appointment find that only a portion of the cost is covered, leaving individuals to cover the rest of the cost, which could be well over \$100 per hour.

Well, if you want to properly address the problem of PTSD, you have to take health and safety concerns seriously. Correctional officers and staff wage a mental battle each and every day that they go to work, knowing that they will be, in fact, understaffed, that they won't have the resources required to perform their duties in safe conditions, and that the inmate population is being made up of more and more hostile individuals due to the province's over-reliance on lockdowns to cover for understaffing. These people are strong—that is, the correctional officers. They're strong, mentally as well as physically, but they're human, and they need help.

So much of what we discuss on this issue deals with trust. For a first responder to open up and share their feelings with peers or loved ones, trust must first be built. Just like any other support system, first responders—and I'm including correctional officers—need to know that their government is truly listening to their concerns and will act on their behalf as a committed partner. We cannot allow our first responders to lose faith in the province. If that happens, we run the risk of discouraging those who are suffering from stepping forward and starting that often long and painful road to recovery. We all need to show that we are committed.

So I'd like it take a moment, in conclusion, just to make a few key points here. As I begin to conclude my remarks, I would like to raise some of the questions that have been raised since the introduction of the bill. One of the most common questions that I hear, quite frankly, and I've heard it from front-line first responders: "Will this open the floodgates to PTSD claims?"

I understand the concern. However, presumptive legislation does not mean that you do not require any proof whatsoever that you're suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. You just don't get the check on PTSD once they approve it. It takes time. There's a check mark on a form that says "PTSD"; you don't just check it and say, "Well, that's it." A doctor will still have to confirm that you have PTSD, but now you will not have to go to WSIB and prove that the issue stems from events the workplace.

More questions that I've heard about Bill 163 include: Are civilian police and special constable employees covered by this bill? Why were probation and parole officers and provincial bailiffs left out of Bill 163?

There are certainly some concerns that we're going to hear about at committee from various stakeholder groups, and it's my sincere hope that all relevant stakeholders will be able to say that their voices were heard at the end of the day.

Given how long the road to getting the government to commit to supporting PTSD legislation—beyond second reading, that is—as legislators, it is our duty to ensure we get it right. With that, Speaker, I'll turn it over to the member from Wellington-Halton Hills to continue along in debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Daiene Vernile): The member for Wellington-Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity this

afternoon to speak to this important debate on Bill 163, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act with respect to posttraumatic stress disorder. I speak following my good friend and colleague the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex, who also serves as our caucus's critic for the Ministry of Community Safety and does an outstanding job.

As the leadoff speakers for our caucus, I think, together, we're beginning the debate—although it started yesterday, as matter of fact. We had to stand down the debate for the leadoff speeches because I was in the chair yesterday, and I think he's going to be taking the chair again shortly. The fact is that we're all doing double duty these days, it seems. We are pleased, though, to be able to participate in a meaningful way in this particular debate.

This is important legislation that the government has introduced. I should point out that it was only introduced for first reading last Thursday. It was called for debate yesterday and today. I think it's clear that the government intends to proceed with relatively swift consideration of this bill. Certainly, on our side of the House, we believe that this is legislation whose time has come, and we would hope to see it considered on the fast track.

This bill amends the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder. The new section 14 in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, provides that certain workers who are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder are entitled to benefits for that disorder under the act if certain conditions are met. The section creates a presumption that post-traumatic stress disorder in those workers arises out of, and in the course of, the workers' employment, unless the contrary is shown. The bill sets out procedural and transactional rules governing claims under the new section.

The bill amends the Ministry of Labour Act to allow the minister to collect information relating to the prevention of post-traumatic stress disorder in certain workplaces. That's really a summary of what the bill is intended to do.

During the course of this debate, we've heard from a number of members who have spoken about their support for the first responders in their communities. I'm privileged to be here today first and foremost representing the people of Wellington-Halton Hills. I am pleased to have the chance to express my admiration and my appreciation for, and the outstanding devotion that I have to, the first responders in my constituency. I've had the opportunity to work with particularly our volunteer firefighters through the years, but I think of the ambulance attendants and I think of the police officers and everyone who worked so hard to help the people in my constituency, when they call 911 and the emergency response that takes place.

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During the course of my tenure in this Legislature, I've had the opportunity to bring forward a number of bills to support, in particular, as I said, our volunteer

firefighters. The very first private member's bill that I had that was actually passed into law was in 1994, during the tenure of the New Democratic Party government. My bill amended the Highway Traffic Act to allow volunteer firefighters to use flashing green lights on their personal vehicles while they were travelling to and from an emergency. I was pleased that the government of the day saw fit, even though I was sitting in the opposition, to allow that bill to pass into law.

Today, Mr. Speaker, in rural Ontario, if you see the flashing green light on a vehicle, you know that that's a volunteer firefighter who is trying to get to an emergency. It's something that I know that our fire services have found to be very helpful.

In the late 1990s, when our party was in government, I introduced a private member's bill to support our volunteer firefighters with respect to workers' compensation legislation, which would—the bill, had it been passed—have enabled the municipalities, who are the employers of the volunteer or, as we often call them, part-time firefighters, to purchase the highest level of workers' compensation coverage for their firefighters. The bill was not passed into law, but I was pleased that, shortly after I introduced the bill and advocated for it, the government of the day—the Honourable Jim Flaherty, actually, as Minister of Labour, introduced an identical government bill, which was absolutely the same as my bill except it, of course, had the minister's name on it instead of the backbencher's name. But the fact is, it was introduced as a government bill and it was passed into law, the very same bill that I had introduced. So I was very pleased about that, obviously.

In 2002, I brought forward legislation to support two-hatter firefighters. That became a very controversial issue, but at the same time, it was supported by the Fire Fighters' Association of Ontario, which was the volunteer firefighters association; the fire chiefs association; AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario; and many volunteer firefighters across the province who supported the legislation. That bill did not pass into law, but it was actually the longest debate of any private member's bill in the history of the Ontario Legislature in terms of the hours of debate. Of course, last year, the government brought in legislation which in some way has provided the legislative protection for two-hatter firefighters that I had sought so long ago in 2002. So I was very pleased about that.

I know that in 2007 the provincial Liberal government—Steve Peters at the time was the Minister of Labour—brought forward Bill 221, which was the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act (Presumptions for Firefighters), 2007. That bill received first, second and third reading on the very same day. It was on May 3, 2007, that it was introduced. My colleague the member for Simcoe—Grey was our party's labour critic at that time. He stood up and he actually sought the unanimous consent of the House to allow the bill to be called for second and third reading the same day, because as you know, Mr. Speaker, the rules of the House don't

normally provide for that. It requires the unanimous consent of every single member to agree to that happening. I think the government was surprised that we had done this—sought the immediate passage of the bill—but they went along with it. I think it's to the credit of the member for Simcoe—Grey that it happened. The fact is, it was passed into law.

It became apparent, shortly thereafter, that the government, even though they had committed to extending that same presumptive legislation to the volunteer fire service, appeared to be dragging their heels in terms of adding that regulatory change. So I brought forward another private member's bill calling upon the government to do this and tried to draw attention to the fact that it had been—I think it took two years, or maybe two and a half years—I'd have to double-check—before the government finally included the volunteer firefighters in that presumptive legislation.

So I've had a lot of issues, and I've been honoured, really, by the Fire Fighters' Association of Ontario with honorary membership in their organization, so I feel a sense of fraternity with the firefighters in rural Ontario and the volunteer firefighters across the province, and I certainly do appreciate everything that they do. They do an outstanding job in our communities; I can't say enough.

Getting back to the bill, we're told that this PTSD legislation is part of the government's overall strategy to support first responders. It's not just this bill, of course. The government has a broader prevention strategy that they've talked about, to ensure that our first responders have adequate support with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, as we commonly call it in the Legislature. Of course, part of the strategy is this particular bill, Bill 163, the amendment to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act and the Ministry of Labour Act. Also, the government, I think, has quite correctly looked at this in a broader sense, and their broader strategy includes a public awareness campaign to increase awareness and reduce the stigma.

As we know from our conversations with many of the first responders, there is, to some degree, a stigma attached to post-traumatic stress disorder. In some cases, people who are experiencing it are just told to suck it up, so to speak. Maybe I shouldn't have used that term, but that's what I hear they're told: to deal with it their own way. Unfortunately, there isn't adequate support for them. By reducing the stigma, we would, hopefully, bring it into the open and show greater compassion for the victims, and in turn give them greater support such that they can overcome the illness.

Part two of the government's initiative is an annual leadership summit that the minister tells us he's going to have, to highlight best practices, recognize leaders and monitor progress. I don't know when that first summit is going to be held, but I would encourage the minister, if he is going to do this, to move forward with it forthwith and, hopefully, involve other members of the Legislature who might be interested in attending and participating, and not just make it a partisan thing.

Number three is the PTSD resource tool kit that the government talks about, a free electronic resource provided by the Public Services Health and Safety Association, with content tailored to meet the needs of employers and first responder sectors. Again, that appears to be a website to raise awareness and promote best practices. The government is also committing to support research, to provide grants for research that supports the prevention of PTSD—because of course part of the initiative of the government has to be to help the people who are currently diagnosed with PTSD, but surely they should be making great efforts to prevent PTSD. Through greater counselling and support in the workplace, we would hope we could reduce the incidence of the illness.

We know that PTSD can develop following exposure to one or more traumatic events. Our first responders are on the front lines of car accidents, fires, all kinds of emergencies, and in some cases responding to violent acts. The symptoms are often debilitating and may include: intrusive thoughts—re-experiencing and re-imagining what has happened and what the individual has seen; avoidance; negative change in cognitive ability and mood; and increased reactivity and arousal. For example, a person might be very quick-tempered.

These mental illnesses or conditions can be quite debilitating, depending on their severity.

We know that first responders are at least twice as likely as the general population to suffer from PTSD, due to the risk of frequent exposure to traumatic stressors. That should give us all reason to pause and to consider what we're going to do. Obviously, if it's twice as bad for first responders, clearly there's an issue and we need to respond to it. I think that's an important point to make.

There is a manual which helps medical specialists—psychologists and psychiatrists—to diagnose PTSD. Diagnostic manual number 5, which is the fifth edition, states, “Rates of PTSD are higher among veterans and others whose vocation increases the risk of traumatic exposure....” That would include not just include war veterans, but also first responders, I would argue, Mr. Speaker, and I think you would agree.

Other studies similarly indicate that first responders have a higher likelihood to suffer PTSD due to the risk of routine exposure to traumatic stressors in daily work, with rates as high as 27% in some sectors. That's significant, too, Mr. Speaker, and I think it needs to be considered.

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We also are told that there is research that shows that PTSD results in more suicide attempts than any other anxiety disorder. That again indicates the severity of the problem in many people. According to statistics that were compiled by Tema Conter with respect to Canada, almost half of first responder suicides over the last few years have been in Ontario. Of course, as you know, Mr. Speaker, we comprise approximately 40% of the Canadian population, and yet we seem to be overrepresented in this tragic number of suicides with regard to first responders.

We know that the Minister of Labour held a round table on work-related traumatic mental stress in 2012 and that that was really when the government started to study this issue. Now, 2012 is about four years away, so it's been a long time coming, and while we would in a general sense encourage the government to consult on important issues and make sure they get the facts right, it would seem that government should move more quickly on very sensitive issues like this where people are involved in the way they are. I think it's disappointing that it has taken almost four years for us to get to this point, but here we are.

They also followed up their consultations with a summit on work-related traumatic mental stress last year, and during these discussions with labour and employee representatives, as well as mental health experts, there was a consensus, I'm told, that prevention is critical with respect to PTSD; there was a consensus around that point.

There are also, I think, from time to time questions about cost, and we know that the human and economic costs associated with traumatic stress are already significant and include increased absenteeism or resignation from work, increased use of medical services, health deterioration, marriage breakdown and even suicide.

A few months ago, I had an opportunity to speak with a number of former police officers who came to see me in my temporary office that I have in the community of Georgetown. There were four or five of them, and each one, in turn, told me their personal story about the struggle they have had with PTSD. In every case, they had lost their wives. They had lost their families. They had declared bankruptcy. It was one problem after another. They all told me that they had struggled with substance abuse. In every case, they related it back to their problem with PTSD. It was a very, very difficult meeting to listen to. I listened to them probably for 90 minutes that Friday, along with a staff person, and after they left, I said to my assistant, “Clearly there's an issue here that needs to be dealt with and we need to get behind this effort.” I think it was Cheri DiNovo, or I should say the member for Parkdale–High Park, who had introduced a number of bills over a period of years with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder. There was a high level of awareness amongst many in the first responder community that her efforts were being brought to the floor of the House and this was the focus of the discussion. But I'll never forget that meeting. It was very, very tough to hear these stories, and I wanted to do what I could to help.

We also know that the Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center has identified that for people seeking treatment for substance use disorders, it is estimated that nearly one in three is suffering symptoms of PTSD, again reinforcing what I had heard at that meeting. It wasn't a study, but real-life examples of how people had to try and deal with the problem.

There's a general agreement, of course, that PTSD can be prevented or mitigated, given appropriate supports and

timely treatment. Again, that goes back to the summit on work-related traumatic mental stress that I referred to earlier, where there is a belief amongst professionals and those who have studied this issue very carefully that, through greater efforts at prevention, we can make a big difference. Again, we would urge the government to include that in their overall strategy.

There have been two Ombudsman reports that have focused on the need to address traumatic mental stress: the 2012 provincial Ombudsman's report on the OPP and the 2015 Toronto ombudsman's report on Toronto Paramedic Services. I'm told both reports stress the need to do more to help workers suffering from psychological injuries.

Again, with respect to prevention, I think it's important to point out that we need to ensure that there's support for effective prevention for first responders. We know that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board enters the picture once an injury has occurred, but an effective prevention strategy would reduce the numbers of people who are suffering from PTSD. Obviously, that would be better for everyone in the long run. However, when indeed someone has been diagnosed with PTSD, certainly the WSIB needs to be there to ensure that they have quick access to treatment and other supports.

Right now, the WSIB does in fact recognize and acknowledge PTSD as an illness, but currently, to be eligible for entitlements to WSIB benefits for mental stress, the WSIB requires an acute reaction to a sudden or unexpected traumatic event, or a reaction to a series of sudden and unexpected traumatic events arising in the course of employment. But under the WSIB's current adjudication process, pre-Bill 163, the burden of proof is on the worker to establish the work-relatedness of the disorder.

Again, the WSIB adjudicators currently would identify that a sudden and unexpected traumatic event or reaction to a series of sudden and unexpected traumatic events occurred, and the adjudicators must obtain all relevant evidence on non-work stressors and traumatic events to assess work-relatedness. With this bill, if it's established that the first responder has PTSD, it is presumed that it's work-related—and that is really the crux of this legislation—without putting the onus of proof on the claimant.

Mr. Speaker, we see that the government has a strategy to deal with PTSD and respond to it beyond this legislation. We'll be monitoring that carefully to ensure that whatever the minister has committed to they in fact follow through on.

The Ministry of Labour, of course, is introducing with Bill 163 these amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to establish a legislated presumption for first responders. Workers are already entitled to benefits for work-related traumatic mental stress; however, a presumption would help expedite treatment, recovery and return to work for those with PTSD. Under presumption, if a worker covered under the presumption is diagnosed with PTSD, it would be presumed to be work-related and the worker's claim would be accepted.

I also want to point out that there is an amendment to the Ministry of Labour Act as part of this bill. This amendment to the Ministry of Labour Act empowers the minister with a new power to direct broader public sector employers to provide specified information to support the prevention of PTSD in first responders. I know that the minister in his comments when the debate initiated yesterday was quite proud of this, because, I gather, he was directly involved in including that in the legislation. His hope is that by making these plans compulsory and making them public, there will basically be a competition to rise to the top in terms of standards, and that best practices will be shared. I'm sure that's a good thing.

It's also important to point out that other jurisdictions in the country have led the way with respect to responses for PTSD. Actually, the province of Alberta—under, I believe, a Progressive Conservative government, if I'm not mistaken—in 2012 became the first province to provide PTSD presumption for emergency responders: firefighters, emergency medical technicians, police officers and sheriffs. Again, that was four years ago; it's now 2016. That says something, I think, about the Progressive Conservative commitment to this issue across the country.

We also note that on January 1, New Year's Day of this year, the province of Manitoba provided a PTSD presumption for all workers who face a traumatic event or series of events in their work. That came into effect, as I said, last month.

1710

Other provinces are looking at this issue, and bills on presumptive legislation for first responders are being considered, I'm told, in the Yukon territory and in the province of New Brunswick. In Nova Scotia, there's a private member's bill that's been tabled along the lines of what has been proposed here with Bill 163, as I understand it. In Saskatchewan, there are public hearings and consultations on PTSD in emergency medical workers, with a report due this year. But again, I think it's worthwhile to note that it was, in fact, a Progressive Conservative government in the province of Ontario that led the way and was the first one to introduce legislation and pass it.

I want to bring to the attention of the House information that was brought to me by my colleague the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, who received a call from, I believe, a former auxiliary officer of the OPP. He had asked that these concerns be brought forward during the course of this debate. I'm not sure if I have his permission to use his name, so I'm not going to use his name, but it's a real person who contacted the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka's office.

He asked two questions—again, I know that there are ministry staff monitoring this debate, and I would hope that they will give us written answers on these questions: Why is it that auxiliary officers are not included in this initiative; and also asking and expressing the concern that legislation should be retroactive for five to seven years, due to the fact that this legislation has been on the table

since approximately 2009. Not this particular bill, but the intent of this legislation has been before the House.

Another constituent that I want to talk about with respect to this debate—and this gentleman has, in fact, given our office permission to use his name. His name is Norman Traversy and he lives in the community of Erin in my riding of Wellington–Halton Hills. He has been speaking publicly about this issue in terms of his experience with PTSD. In fact, I remember he let me know that he was going to be on the Roy Green radio show one Sunday afternoon, and I had a chance to listen in. He's very articulate. I just want to relay his story to you, Mr. Speaker, and the rest of the members of the House.

He wrote very recently to the new president and CEO of the WSIB, and he said this:

"I listened with interest to CBC's Ontario Today show this afternoon, and heard your comments regarding the way the WSIB assesses worker injury claims. I commend you for appearing on the show and listening and responding to the callers' complaints. At one point in the show you spoke about the WSIB's medical consultants, doctors and nurses, and how they are utilized in assessing claims. I know that you have only been on the job for three weeks, but this is definitely not the way the WSIB assesses claims. In my case, and in the case of countless other claimants, medical assessments were unlawfully made by untrained, unqualified, laypersons. These were adjudicators who had no business medically assessing claimants and subsequently making medical diagnoses. In doing so these adjudicators ignored the diagnoses of qualified medical practitioners, sometimes with fatal results for a claimant.

"Toronto police constable Darius Garda was one such person. He was diagnosed with job-related PTSD by mental health professionals. The WSIB ignored this diagnosis and denied him help. He fell into financial ruin and, on February 4 of this year, he drowned himself in Toronto harbour. I'm convinced that if the WSIB had followed its own procedures and properly assessed this person, he would be alive today.

"My case is similar to Constable Garda's. I was a professional firefighter with the Mississauga fire department. I have been diagnosed with job-related PTSD by six qualified mental health professionals—psychiatrists and psychologists. There have been no dissenting opinions from any other doctors. The WSIB adjudicator ignored these diagnoses and unlawfully issued his own. He said that I did not have PTSD; I had 'traumatic mental stress,' which at the time was not compensable.

"The WSIAT went one better; without consulting any quality mental health professionals, they said that I did not have PTSD or traumatic mental stress (because it was now compensable); what I had was, in fact, socio-economic stress (the same condition that killed Constable Garda). This unlawful behaviour is, on its face, ludicrous and deadly.

"Your predecessor and the Minister of Labour are aware of this. I wrote to the minister about this state of affairs last September."

Mr. Speaker, I would add that Mr. Traversy has written many letters to me as his MPP and to ministers of labour, and I have followed up on his behalf and spoken directly to the Minister of Labour about this particular constituent and his issues. So I would certainly confirm that he has written numerous letter—very well-worded, well-written letters, I might add—talking about his particular experience with this terrible affliction.

I'll go back to his letter:

"Ten first responders have committed suicide in the first six weeks of this year. These were preventable deaths. This is a serious public health issue that must be addressed.

"On the CBC radio show, you stated that the WSIB was investigating whether claims were being properly assessed from a medical point of view. I know that the OFL and the Ontario Ombudsman are also doing this. Please investigate and review my claim. It was not properly assessed, my medical information was completely ignored, I was not treated professionally or courteously and the WSIB hearing process made my PTSD worse.

"As part of the appeals process, I know that the WSIB can reconsider and re-adjudicate a claim at any time it sees fit to do so. You have the power and the authority to do the right thing. I appeal to your common decency to end the 10 years of misery that I and my family have endured. I don't know how much more I can take."

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a letter that went to the new president and CEO of the WSIB, dated February 17, just a few days ago. I would ask the Minister of Labour to look into this matter and see what he can do to help.

I'm running out of time, but I also had a meeting very recently with another first responder suffering with PTSD. He asked me to keep his name in confidence, and I would certainly respect that. I wrote to the Minister of Labour shortly after that meeting—we met just a few days ago, and I wrote to the minister on February 18. I said this to the minister:

"I met with a constituent who is a former firefighter who is struggling with PTSD. As you know, PTSD can be serious and debilitating. I was glad when your government recently announced a new PTSD strategy for first responders....

"I am aware that you are bringing forward legislation to ensure that first responders have access to treatment for PTSD. As you prepare to introduce this new legislation, I want to share with you an excerpt from an e-mail my constituent sent me following this meeting:

"Consider making each service responsible to get information out regarding PTSD and how and where to get help to all past employees. Also, they should make an effort to reach out to and learn from those who have been in the battle. Asking past employees why they left? Have they since been diagnosed with PTSD? Did they make a WSIB claim (and when most say no, ask why)? Ask about their family life, finances, substance dependency, if they are presently working...."

Mr. Speaker, I gather that I'm out of time. But certainly, I want to conclude with the support of our caucus for

this bill. We will be voting for it when this debate concludes, and we look toward to participating at committee as this bill continues to make its way through the legislative process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to offer some thoughts on the comments that were provided to us today by the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex and the member for Wellington-Halton Hills.

Certainly, we welcome Bill 163. New Democrats have been pushing for this kind of legislation, under the leadership of our colleague the MPP for Parkdale-High Park, for at least seven years. The member for Parkdale-High Park did not let up in her advocacy. She introduced five private member's bills, raised this issue on numerous occasions in this place and pushed to make sure that these changes were introduced in this province.

This legislation is long overdue, Speaker. We need to show the support that our first responders deserve for the injuries they experience working on our behalf, making our lives safe in the work that they do.

1720

We know, Speaker—there is indisputable evidence—about the impact of trauma on a person's physical well-being. We know that there is a much higher incidence of police officers dying by suicide because of the trauma that they experience during the work that they do. This legislation will recognize that trauma as a work-related injury, and it will allow them to be compensated and their families to be compensated, which is just one small, small thing that we can do to recognize the service that these men and women have provided for our communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: The Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act, if passed, would provide a sense of security to Ontario's first responders, including Barrie firefighter Cory Mainprize and his members, as well as the members of the Barrie police force and paramedics.

It will create a presumption that PTSD diagnosed in first responders is a result of a worker's employment. This ensures that first responders will not have to go through the process of proving their PTSD, which we know can lead to further stress and delay in treatment. We want to make sure that those who need help get it, and get it as soon as they can. Expedited adjudication will enable faster access to compensation and proper treatment, ultimately supporting recovery outcomes.

However, just creating a presumption that PTSD in first responders is a result of a worker's employment is not enough. As former speakers have said, we have to find ways to implement preventive solutions as well. I think the minister has worked very hard on this bill to make sure that we are trying to act on those issues as well. If passed, this bill will permit the Minister of Labour to request prevention plans from affected em-

ployers. I think that's one of the most important parts of the bill. We have to find a way to deal with the number of people who get PTSD.

I'm very proud of the part our government is taking in this issue, that they took the time to write the proper piece of legislation as part of a comprehensive plan, and that we took time to get it right. I urge you to support this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It was a pleasure to listen to the leads from my colleagues from both Chatham-Kent-Essex and Wellington-Halton Hills.

Before I became an MPP, I had a meeting with Vince Savoia. Many of you in this chamber probably are aware of Vince and his work at the Tema trust and Heroes Are Human. He gave a very compelling reason why PTSD and this legislation is so critically important.

My work on the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions showed how long it takes people to seek out the help. When I hear now that individuals who are over in the Whitby area dealing with Ontario Shores after they reach out and look for help are being asked to wait for up to a year to get any kind of treatment, to me is such an indictment of what we need to do and how we can serve better.

We have to understand that individuals who are suffering are not coming forward the day after a traumatic incident. It takes time. It takes time for them to admit they need the help and it takes time for them to seek out where that help can be. Quite frankly, a lot of our first responders don't want to admit that there is an issue and to seek help. So to think that after they've gone through all of that and then to be told that they have to wait for a year—it speaks to the treatment aspect of this legislation and how this is a good first step, but it is, in fact, a first step.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments? The member from Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. I was pleased to listen to your debate on this bill, as well as our colleague from Wellington-Halton Hills. You referenced, at the beginning of your speech, the tragic accident on the 401 in the 1990s.

You think about that day: There probably wasn't a first responder who wasn't called to that location on the 401 to support and help the victims of that accident. In fact, in a small community like Windsor and Essex county and in Chatham, it's hard to know somebody who wasn't affected or involved in that

It speaks to the vital role that our first responders play and the need for us, as community leaders and as a community, to rally around them to give them the support they need to continue to do that job. This is one more component, one more tool in the toolbox to deliver that support.

I'm excited to get this bill passed and to let our constituents know that this exists now. I'm sure that it will infuse a measure of pride, maybe even in this institution, because it has been a long time coming that we see

something positive come out of this place for people who really deserve it. That's something that I think we should all be proud of.

I certainly want to commend my colleague the member from Parkdale–High Park, who has continued to fight this fight in tandem with first responders, who have been relentless in getting government action on this. It's a really proud day to be here today.

When I was first elected in 2011, I learned about the issue, I learned about the bill and I had the chance to meet first responders. One I want to give a shout-out to is Natalie Harris. She's a paramedic. You can follow her on Twitter; it's ParamedicNat1. She has a blog as well. She has played a vital role informing everyone, but also breaking down those barriers about her own journey and healing through PTSD. I'm just really proud to have met her and her colleagues. I'm proud to stand here on this day to see this bill become reality.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for final comments.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank the members for London West, Barrie, Dufferin–Caledon and Essex for their responses to our speeches. Mr. Speaker, you led off this debate. Again, I would like to emphasize that you, in your role as our critic for community safety, led off this debate in terms of our critic's response. That underlines and underscores our caucus's concern for our first responders. I thought you gave a fine speech, so well done.

I want to respond quickly to the member for Dufferin–Caledon. I think she's too modest. Her very first question in the Ontario Legislature after her election was related to an issue involving the fire service in her community. That shows her interest, obviously, in the fire service as well as in all first responders, I believe, in her constituency and across the province.

She did an outstanding job with the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, through 18 months of public hearings, deliberations and report writing. Those recommendations were part of an all-party consensus effort, where we came together as members to try to work together to confirm a strategy, and I think a very fine example of cross-party co-operation, something that we need to be doing more of around this place on issues where we can work together.

She emphasized the fact, based on her experience with those hearings, that many people who experience a mental health disorder struggle with it for a long time before they eventually seek help. It's unacceptable that people would have to wait up to a year to receive the treatment that they need, even the initial assessments in some cases. It's obviously a very serious problem and we need to be doing more. I think, in a broader sense, the government has an obligation and responsibility to respond to all of those recommendations in that report as part of their ongoing mental health strategy.

Again, I want to thank the members for responding to our comments and reiterate that our caucus is supportive

of this bill and our party's leader, Patrick Brown, is very supportive as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

M^{me} Lisa Gretzky: Il me fait plaisir d'intervenir au nom de mes électeurs de Windsor West et de participer au débat sur le projet de loi 163.

Primarily, this bill seeks to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act to presume that first responders who sustain post-traumatic stress acquired the illness on the job. In other words, when first responders are diagnosed with PTSD, they would not have to prove that their job caused the trauma.

1730

Post-traumatic stress disorder, as defined by the Canadian Mental Health Association, is an anxiety disorder characterized by reliving a psychologically traumatic situation. Often, this is experienced through flashbacks, nightmares and intense feelings of terror. People who experience PTSD may withdraw from family and friends as a result of their symptoms.

Imagine, just for a moment, that you went through an intensely traumatic situation and then were forced to relive that experience while you slept or, in some cases, those who suffer from PTSD are robbed of the ability to sleep. Imagine that these symptoms cause you to withdraw from your loved ones, frustrating those who care about you the most.

Unfortunately, too many of our first responders don't have to imagine this. They live the symptoms of PTSD each and every day. These are the women and men who, every day, run towards danger when you or I would run away, and work to keep us alive and safe. We ask so much of these dedicated professionals, and I'm proud that today we can start asking just a little bit less.

The intent of this bill recognizes that traumatic situations occur each and every day in the lives of our first responders when they're working in our communities across Ontario. First responders who suffer from PTSD deserve the utmost access to care but are forced through a painstaking process to prove that post-traumatic stress was obtained while serving the public. They must prove a causal link between their post-traumatic stress and a workplace event.

Speaker, let's take a look at the diagnostic requirements the WSIB outlines for someone to prove this causal link. According to WSIB, "In order to consider entitlement for traumatic mental stress, a decision-maker must identify that a sudden and unexpected traumatic event occurred. A traumatic event may be a result of a criminal act, harassment, or a horrific accident, and may involve actual or threatened death or serious harm against the worker, a co-worker, a worker's family member, or others...."

"The worker must have suffered or witnessed the traumatic event first-hand, or heard the traumatic event first-hand through direct contact with the traumatized individual(s) (e.g., speaking with a victim(s) on the radio or telephone as the traumatic event is occurring)."

Right now, we are forcing people with an illness that causes them to relive traumatic events to go through a process of thinking through and filling out forms pertaining to these events. Is this system re-traumatizing those it is meant to help? Of course it is. It doesn't make sense that when those people are injured by trauma that they've witnessed, we force them to go through the very same lengthy process as the rest of us to get compensation for PTSD.

The bill amends the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act to presume that first responders who sustain post-traumatic stress acquired the illness on the job. This presumption would ease the process for receiving benefits for first responders. This bill will help first responders come forward and get the necessary treatment quickly to heal as best as possible and get back to work. These professions not only have elevated rates of PTSD, but many first responders find it difficult to seek the help that they need. They are tough people, and it can be difficult for them to ask others for help.

The proposed legislation is also similar to an Ontario law passed in 2007 affecting firefighters who develop any of eight types of cancers.

Any costs associated with work-related claims are paid by the WSIB. Employers pay WSIB premiums. As such, employers indirectly pay the costs of all WSIB claims. As PTSD is already an occupational illness covered under WSIB policy in Ontario, it is not anticipated that the number of claims received will change significantly with presumptive legislation for first responders. It is also not anticipated that any additional successful claims will have any significant overall impact on employer premiums. The sooner we can provide assistance for people living with PTSD, the sooner they can start living with their illness, repair family relationships and get some relief from their experiences.

There are some very positive items in this bill. I'm proud to say that it was my colleague from Parkdale-High Park who introduced this legislation nearly eight years ago for the first time and has brought it forward four more times since then. I think we owe a lot to her dedication and perseverance on this issue. Certainly, given her lead peruse on this bill in the chamber yesterday, we get a sense of the strong impact that first responders have had on her life, and I would like to thank my colleague for her work on this legislation and her forward thinking.

I can't help but think how far ahead we would have been on this issue had the government adopted her initial legislation. Seven years ago, we could have had a framework to expedite WSIB claims for emergency responders, and we could have built on this throughout the years. Seven years ago, this government had a chance to make Ontario a leader in creating laws that are sensitive to the emergency responders living with PTSD. This government had the opportunity to adopt a bill proposed by New Democrats and make our province a leader in assisting first responders with PTSD. Imagine

the difference this would have made in people's lives had the legislation been passed nearly a decade ago, when my colleague from Parkdale-High Park was pleading.

Since taking office, I have had a steady stream of constituents writing to demonstrate their support for the work of my colleague and the bill before us—with amendments, of course. One constituent writes, "Please help us prevent any more deaths among such a vulnerable and valiant group of helpers in our communities. Please support paramedics, police officers, firefighters, communication officers etc. across Ontario and support Bill 2," which is what it was called at the time they were sending me messages.

Waiting to act on this issue is a missed opportunity for our province. We are finally debating similar legislation today. The provisions outlined in the Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) expand coverage to include first responders and other workers: firefighters—full-time, part-time and volunteer; fire investigators; paramedics; communications officers; emergency medical attendants; police officers; workers in correctional institutions; emergency dispatchers; and workers in a place of secure custody or secure temporary detention. It also explicitly includes members of a First Nation emergency response team.

Speaker, I think it's important to understand the roles that these professionals play in our lives. Firefighters in Windsor and across Ontario are dedicated professionals we depend on each and every day. According to the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, among the 11,000 full-time firefighters, approximately 30 have been diagnosed with PTSD.

I've met with many of the firefighters in my community, toured their facilities, and listened to their stories about life on the job and even their own experiences with first responders. I'd like to share a story that was shared with me by one of our local firefighters. He's a captain, and I won't share his name because I didn't get consent to share his name. But he told me a very touching story about when he was a child. He had a traumatic incident where he was injured, he was burned, and the firefighters came to his aid. There was a firefighter who, as traumatic as it would be to see a child burned, managed to comfort this particular gentleman, who remembers how kind and how considerate this firefighter was. That was what prompted him to then later become a firefighter himself.

Paramedics, ambulance communications officers, and emergency medical attendants and dispatch operators: According to the Tema Conter Memorial Trust, research estimates the prevalence of PTSD within paramedics as between 16% and 24%. Remember that these professionals are tasked with emergency medical care and witness some very traumatic scenes as a result.

As you spoke to earlier, Speaker, and my colleague from Essex also touched on it in the two minutes that he had to speak, I remember in 1999 when all of southwestern Ontario was devastated by an 87-car pileup on the 401 near Windsor. In fact, I believe it was right near the Manning Road turnoff, which would be in my

colleague's riding of Essex. It was a horrific accident, and I remember watching the reports coming in while I was at work at the time. I remember thinking about who first received the emergency request for assistance, and then thinking about the paramedics and other emergency professionals and first response personnel who would need to treat the injured in this accident. As you touched on, Speaker, this was a horrific accident. It was very thick fog, and when you see pictures of the accident that day, although we did lose some people, it's amazing that more lives were not lost. I can just imagine, if I can remember vividly what happened, what it must be like for the first responders who showed up to help the people that day.

1740

Police officers suffer higher rates of physical injuries and psychological injuries compared to the general population. One study indicates that 15% of police officers may experience PTSD compared to anywhere from 1% to 8% of the general population, but it's the narratives and shared personal experiences that truly illustrate what these professionals go through.

At one point, I thought maybe I'd want to be a nurse and then I realized that really wasn't a job for me because, unfortunately, nurses lose patients. Then I thought maybe I'd like to be a paramedic and then I realized, 'Well, they often lose patients too.' Sometimes they come up on accident scenes, and I'm really not equipped myself, I don't think, to deal with something like that.

I was speaking to an OPP officer who was a patient in the dental office I worked in at the time. We were going back and forth discussing a few things, and he started to recount some of the accident scenes that he had come upon. This was a veteran OPP officer; he had been on the job for 25 years plus. It was amazing to me that he was able to give me dates and times of accidents. He probably could recall the names of those in the accidents, but of course he's not going to. He doesn't want to breach any privacy. But it's amazing the amount of detail that our first responders hold on to, that they retain after they've come to an accident scene.

I would be remiss as the former critic for community safety and correctional services if I didn't mention workers in our correctional institutions. I've spoken to many correctional officers during my time at the Legislature. I'm glad they are included in this legislation.

I'd like to share a story from a correctional officer I met with once—again, a veteran correctional officer; he had been in service for at least 20 years. He shared a story with me about a young fellow who was in custody. He had mental health issues. As is standard, due to government regulation, those with mental health issues who might be a harm to themselves are put into segregation. This young fellow, day after day after day, was asking to be taken out of segregation. He felt he was more of a danger to himself being in segregation than if he was put back into the general population and amongst other people. This corrections officer said he would do his best to get him out of there. He knew he really shouldn't be there.

Unfortunately, one day the corrections officer came in, and that young fellow had taken his own life. He was put on a gurney out in the hallway while they waited for someone to come and transport him outside the facility. That particular correctional officer had to walk past this deceased inmate several times throughout the day. As he was recounting this, he was actually tearing up and crying in my office. So imagine a very strong, large man, a tough man, being able to recall something like this and breaking down. It's heartbreaking to hear their stories.

I think every professional who will be included in this legislation can think of experiences similar to those I've outlined, which is why this legislation is so important. As we debate this bill, I do think it's important to consider the benefits this legislation would have if it was extended to include other emergency and first response personnel, like nurses, probation and parole officers, and so many more.

Speaker, I'm cognizant of my time.

I had one of my local firefighters reach out to me and share a statement. I'll be honest with you: When I received it this morning—I'm choking up now, actually. I got through the first line and I had to put it down. I'm going to try and get through it. I have tissues here in case I need them. This will probably take up my last six minutes, but I'm going to try and get through it. These are the words of Duane Janisse, who is the president of the Windsor Professional Firefighters Association:

"You're searching in the fire on your hands and knees and the heat is unbearable. Smoke's banked to the floor and you're desperately searching for the child they said was just inside the door. You answered the call.

"A young mother holding her lifeless, grey, cold infant shoves the baby into your arms with tears pouring down her cheeks."

I'm sorry, Speaker.

"She begs you to please save her baby girl. You know it's too late, but you do all that you can. You answered the call.

"You roll into the neighbourhood where the lawns are manicured and the cars shiny and new. You grab your gear and rush to the front door. As you step into the new home, on the floor in the hallway is the most beautiful, blond 16-year-old girl with the needle still in her arm. Her parents are crying, trying to comfort each other, and saying to you, 'We were only gone for an hour.' You answered the call.

"You arrive at a modest, single-storey home; the flames are shooting from every opening in the house. You stretch hose lines and ladder the structure. Despite your best efforts, the fire is the victor. You're exhausted and wet and covered in soot. While packing the rig, the homeowner sits on the curb, face in his hands, sobbing out loud, saying, 'That's all that I had and now it's gone.' You answered the call.

"You're standing at roll call at the beginning of shift. Your comrade is missing and not responding to calls and texts. The captain and crew head over to his place, as it's just around the corner. While checking the home and

peering in the windows, you witness what no one ever wants to see. Your brother is lying on his bed in a pool of blood with a gun in his hand. You empty his locker and question: How can this be? You answered the call.

"You're 21 years old and fresh on the job. You've heard some of the stories but experienced none of them yet. You pry open the door to the apartment and the captain walks in. As you search the apartment, the captain calls out, 'He's over here.' You enter the bedroom and the captain tells you to cut him down. As you cut the electrical cord from his neck the middle-aged man slumps to the ground. You answered the call.

"You head into the grocery store for grub for the crew. On the way in, an angry citizen calls you lazy and selfish and berates you. You nod and walk away; into the store you go. In the vegetable aisle the clerk rushes over and in a panicked voice says a woman needs help three aisles over. You rush to her side and begin CPR. You work on her hard, pushing on her chest, hoping to revive her. Forty minutes later she's pronounced by EMS. The ride back to the station is quiet as can be as you think about her three kids coming home from school and finding they have a mother no longer. You answered the call.

"The tractor-trailer is fully engulfed in flames; the screams of the trapped driver cut through the dense fog, no doubt a factor in the rear-end collision. You jump into action and stretch a hand line and your driver rushes to get you water in time. The screams subside before the water can get there and you know it's too late for the driver in there. You answered the call.

"You enter the funeral home with your uniform pressed and your shoes are all shined and you look your best. A long line of members parade past the casket: another fallen member to cancer. She's much too young to leave this world, and you wonder to yourself as you pass by how many more of these will you need to attend. Your thoughts are interrupted as you look into the faces of her heartbroken family. You answered the call.

"You enter the house in a poor neighbourhood. They don't have much and it's apparent they can't make ends meet. As your crew deals with the issue and you gather information, a three-year-old boy dressed only in his underwear grabs onto your leg and hugs ever so tightly. As you try to leave you can't pry him away and he sobs bitterly to take him with you as you leave that day. You answered the call.

"When you arrive on the scene, the 10-year-old boy is frantic and, in between deep sobs, blurts out something about his grandfather in the backyard. The driver attempts to console the lad while the crew makes its way to the backyard to find grandpa with a shotgun still in his mouth. You answered the call.

"You knock on the door of the old grey-haired lady and she yells to come in. At the kitchen table she waits. It's been three months since your last welfare visit. You ask her all the standard questions about her safety but she insists on talking about the family she once had. You sit and listen to the stories once again and you think how sad and lonely it must be. You answered the call.

"You're out with the group. They're as broken as you and drinking heavily, pretending nothing is wrong. Your family is waiting at home for you and when you show up you're angry and mean to those who love you the most. You answered the call.

"It's 3 a.m. You're watching TV; nothing in particular, just trying to fill the void where sleep should be. On comes a commercial you don't know what about and you begin to cry and think, 'What's wrong with me?' You turn the set off and lay in the dark and close your eyes, hoping to fall asleep. Your mind won't shut off. It's like a big screen, flashing hundreds of slides of all that you've seen. You answered the call.

"For decades, these things have been haunting me and my friends. With nowhere to turn, for many it was the end. We finally had the courage to ask for help and we reached out to you to protect the protectors. We were happy and relieved when we heard the news someone cared and would help us out. Today on behalf of myself, my members and all first responders in this province, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the members of this Legislature who have supported us. You answered the call."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I want to begin my remarks today on Bill 163 by honouring the comments of the member from Windsor West—a very emotional, very heartfelt—just terrific. Congratulations, colleague, on a very emotional and very heartfelt speech.

1750

I may say, Speaker, I want to start by also congratulating the MPP for Oakville and Minister of Labour, and the MPP for Ottawa Centre and minister for community services, and also, while we're honouring the contributions of colleagues in the House, the member for Parkdale-High Park, who, as the member for Windsor West noted, started this conversation in this House many years ago.

We stand on the shoulders of many speakers, but if I may, in the time I have left, I want to speak about the importance of this legislation from a singular and important perspective. As many members of this House will know, my late husband was a police officer. He started his career in Metro Toronto and then joined the OPP, where he spent 18 happy years saving lives across this province.

I know, as his former spouse, what it was like when he would come home from a call that he found very, very difficult. Fortunately, we were blessed with a very good relationship, Speaker, so in the context of our relationship we could have that conversation, sometimes over a coffee or a late dinner or a glass of wine, that people tend to have when they have seen something in their day that's been very difficult. I felt blessed by that. But that was a conversation that we could have, and not everybody can have it.

One of the reasons I am pleased that this legislation has come forward is because it's going to allow officers

on duty to have the kind of conversation that they need to have. That doesn't happen on the job right now—not nearly enough. Talking about mental illness could have been, in the past, until now, a career-limiting move. This legislation is not only important from all kinds of aspects—from a preventative aspect, for treatment, for presumptive issues—but also because it's going to allow us to change the conversation in workplaces, especially for our first responders. I'm proud that this government has taken that step forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is my profound pleasure to rise in debate today and congratulate my colleague from Windsor. She had us all in tears, and I think it's moments like this, where there are moving tributes and testimony from members on issues like this, that bring us closer together. There is no question in my mind that there is undeniable support for this piece of legislation, not only in this assembly but throughout the province.

Of course, I would be remiss not to congratulate my good friend and colleague Cheri DiNovo, who pushed for this and continued to be an advocate and persevered over all of those times that she brought this forward.

Of course, you must give credit to the minister responsible, Mr. Flynn, and also to my leader, Patrick Brown, who I think, upon becoming not only the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party but an MPP, championed this bill. I think when we put partisan divides to the side, we can accomplish great things.

The fact that we have the opportunity to stand here today and talk about this also reminds me of how important it is to have this conversation, in the brief few seconds I have left. When I learned that this was going to be a very big issue, not just for our military—my husband served in the military and, though not in a combat role, went to Afghanistan twice with the Minister of Defence and was part of the operations. It was pretty tough. But one Christmas we were in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, staying at my mother's house. The Minister of Defence at the time was Peter MacKay, whom my husband worked for. They lost five soldiers that day.

We also lost an Ottawa police officer, Eric Czapnik. Some of the paramedics on the scene had post-traumatic stress disorder. That's when I realized that you don't have to be a world away in war to suffer from PTSD. You can be an Ottawa paramedic responding to a violent crime scene of a well-respected police officer. It's for that reason that I've always supported Cheri DiNovo's bill, and it's for that reason that today I'm proud to stand behind my colleague from Windsor West—I hope that's your riding name—to say what a great job you did with your speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a privilege for me to rise and respond to the comments from my colleague the member for Windsor West: the experiences she shared of what it's like to be a first responder, the kinds of things that people

have to deal with that are unimaginable to all of us in our daily lives and how they have to try to process those things that they have witnessed—those horrors and that trauma—and get up the next day and go to work. It's something that none of us can imagine having to deal with. So Bill 163 will create the presumption that first responders who experience PTSD acquired the PTSD in the course of their work.

Certainly, PTSD can impact your entire life. It can impact not just the individual who experiences the PTSD, but their families, their spouses and their children. We know that there are much higher rates of divorce and family stresses when there is PTSD in the family, and family members are often themselves on the front lines of what PTSD means. So this legislation is critically important to create that presumption, so that we don't re-traumatize first responders by forcing them to go through a lengthy process to prove that their PTSD was acquired in the course of their work responsibilities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted, too, to have an opportunity to respond to the member from Windsor West and her comments. I share the view that it was very heartfelt and touched all people on all sides of the House, I'm sure—the comments you had and the emotion that you put into it.

I'd also like to thank and congratulate the member from Parkdale-High Park. She has brought this bill forward numerous times, and there's a whole series of parallels I'm seeing in the number of times a member of the opposition brought a bill forward and it didn't quite make its way through the process. It's not unlike my tipping bill, which another member brought forward on a number of occasions. Then we had a chance to actually make it a better bill, to fill it out more.

That's why I think it was very important that the member from Nepean-Carleton talked about and gave credit where it was due, to the Minister of Labour, in that the Minister of Labour went out and did extensive consultation to broaden the bill, to put a whole bunch of new effort into the bill and where it needed to go, by adding more individuals who could be defined under the definition, bringing fire investigators and First Nation firefighters into the definition, which goes well beyond the original Bill 2, but also adding correctional officers, youth services, First Nation emergency response teams and communications officers.

We took a lot of heat and criticism from members opposite that we didn't bring the bill forward fast enough, but I think that's one of the great strengths that our Minister of Labour has shown—and it's not just on this issue; it's on so many other issues. We see where he goes out and does extensive consultation, so that when he brings a bill forward, he brings it forward in the best possible way that we could have.

I'm particularly impressed by the whole piece in the legislation around prevention. There's no one in this House, I believe, who doesn't appreciate the opportu-

ities that we are going to provide: the training and the advance work with emergency response workers, in order that they will be aware of the potential impacts of exposure to traumatic events, and early intervention after those events, in order to ensure that they don't develop issues around post-traumatic stress disorder.

I do appreciate the comments made. I'm glad that we have universal, uniform support for this. I look forward to it moving forward as quickly as possible so that the piece of legislation that is needed is brought forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Windsor West for final comments.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I appreciate the comments from all members of the House. I just want to make sure—I'm sure I mentioned this particular firefighter's name before I read his statement, but I want to make sure it's on the record. It was firefighter Duane Janisse, the president of the Windsor Professional Firefighters Association, who shared this with me. He also shared that he was up most of the night trying to think about what he would say, because there was so much going through his head. The fact of the matter is that it was 3 a.m. and he wasn't able to sleep, so he decided that he would put pen to paper. I think that this was incredibly moving, incredibly sad, but incredibly beautiful. It was very well written.

He sums it up nicely: that it's our job to protect the protectors. I think that the bill could be expanded a little more to include more of those protectors, but it's certainly a very big step forward in protecting those who put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe, and those who relive this day in and day out. That was difficult for me to say, for me to share somebody else's

memories. I can just imagine what it would be like to actually own those memories, to relive them over and over again, like firefighter Janisse does, to not be able to sleep at night and only think about these horrific things that he has been exposed to.

I'd like to take the opportunity to touch on one thing that he said. That was when the firefighters stopped at the grocery store and some of the sentiment that people share with them about their thoughts on firefighters stopping at the grocery store and going in and some of the things that are said to them. I would just ask that the public remember that firefighters, police officers, EMS, correctional officers and all the first responders—they look tough on the outside but they're really soft on the inside. They do put their lives on the line for our safety and they do internalize a lot of the trauma that they see.

I would ask that everybody applaud and thank a first responder when you have access to them. I would like to start with our very own Sergeant-at-Arms, who used to be an RCMP officer and has been exposed to a few issues in his life, too. I'd like everyone to join me in applauding the first responders and thanking them for their service.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I would like to thank all members who have participated in the debate on Bill 163 with your heartfelt stories.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is now 6 o'clock, and this Legislature stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Jagmeet Singh, Peter Tabuns
Glenn Thibeault
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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Wednesday 24 February 2016

Mercredi 24 février 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller



Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 24 February 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 24 février 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WASTE-FREE ONTARIO ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS DÉCHETS

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 23, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 151, An Act to enact the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016 and the Waste Diversion Transition Act, 2016 and to repeal the Waste Diversion Act, 2002 / Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur la récupération des ressources et l'économie circulaire et la Loi transitoire de 2016 sur le réacheminement des déchets et abrogeant la Loi de 2002 sur le réacheminement des déchets.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When we last debated this issue, the official opposition had the floor.

Further debate? The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Good morning to you, Mr. Speaker. I saw you walk in with a little bit of a limp. I hope everything is good. I know you are an avid athlete, and you do spend a lot of time on the hockey rink, soccer field, badminton—you name it; I always see you all over the place putting on a good sweat. I hope you recover well from that minor injury of yours.

This morning, we are here to debate Bill 151, An Act to enact the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2015 and the Waste Diversion Transition Act, 2015 and to repeal the Waste Diversion Act, 2002. That's quite a title.

It's pretty evident that our province is facing serious challenges with regard to waste management. Last week, the member from Mississauga-Brampton South said, "In the residential sector, 47% of household waste is diverted from landfills, but the rate for the rest of the economy is much, much lower. Existing waste diversion programs cover only 15% of Ontario's waste stream, and over the last decade, our overall waste diversion rate has stalled at 25%."

A few of my colleagues have already spoken to this, and my colleague the member from Toronto-Danforth reminded us that the Blue Box Program is something that was in place largely in the 1990s. This is prior to this

government coming to power in 2003. Since that time, in over a decade, not much else has happened, Mr. Speaker.

I see that there is a new Speaker in the chair. Good morning to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Good morning.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Everyone knows that the problem still exists. My NDP colleagues and I have been raising the issue on a regular basis, and yet this government has not addressed it with real, concrete action.

We can talk about the act. New Democrats have called for greater individual producer responsibility to replace the current system of industry-funded, privately run stewardship monopolies. Individual producer responsibility is long overdue, and we think that this is quite important. This bill allows for a transition to individual producer responsibility. Finally, we're going to do something about it.

But what is very clear to me is that this is just enabling legislation. I've read through this, and I find it to be quite vague. What is clear is that in order for this bill to be successful, we need to ensure that the policies and regulations are clear and will actually create positive change. Unfortunately, these policies have not been disclosed—something that we regularly receive from this government.

Another major concern I see is that there are no timelines in this: no timelines for when the change will happen. I have seen this year after year. I'm glad that my friend from my critic portfolio, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, has joined us here this morning—because we often see things coming from this government where they make many promises, many positive announcements, positive press releases, promise after promise, and then nothing—no action, another media release. We actually are further behind than we were eight years ago.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm glad that my friend is with us this morning. We often have these discussions about many projects, and I'll be touching on another one, so I'm glad he's here this morning.

It's entirely understandable for my colleagues and me to be skeptical. It's even more understandable for organizations and Ontarians to be cynical of this government's legislation. This government says one thing and does the opposite: "Wait. We won't sell our assets. Oh, wait one second. Who wants to buy shares?" or, "Wait, wait. We've got a billion dollars, and we're going to spend that money right now on a road to the Ring of Fire. Oh, wait,

wait. We meant we're going to spend it after the next election."

I could use my entire time here speaking about concrete examples of this government over-promising and under-delivering. What is important here is to deal with the issue at hand. We've got a waste problem, folks. We know that. We've known this for some time. We have got to address it.

In my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin, there's a small community called Goulais River. Goulais River is not a municipality; it's a local services board that provides services to its community members. They had a wonderful initiative through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, which had planted some seed money for some of these municipalities to set themselves up to have a recycling program.

The Goulais River area embraced this program. The community members embraced this program and were very active in it. Unfortunately, the seed money is now gone. While the local services board was working toward a transition, because they get their empowerment through the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, there were delays that happened which pushed them over, and they missed the opportunity to add the recycling program fees to their taxation billing. They've been without their recycling program since June of last year.

Now, it might not seem like much to you, Mr. Speaker, but these were four good jobs in Goulais River—four really good jobs. These individuals in this community really thrived and really worked hard to make sure they recycled everything. When they lost that program, it was very frustrating for them.

I've been working with the minister, and I have to say that we've had many discussions about how we could get this program up and running. However, unfortunately, the year has elapsed and the community did not wait. They went ahead and proceeded to make sure that this coming March, they're going to be able to start their recycling program once again. This is from a local services board. The community deserves it, they want it, and they have thrived and excelled. They're an example of what you can do when a community backs their leadership and actually organizes this. That's the community of Goulais River. I'm very proud to be working with their community leadership.

0910

When I was walking through the community during the summer community parade, I was shaking hands, talking to people and saying hi, passing out candies to the kids, and having lots of pleasantries. However, the one outstanding issue that came up time and time again when I was shaking hands was, "When are you going to give us a recycling program?"

When we see legislation like this, a community like Goulais River wants to see it go into action. They have gone into action. This is what not only Goulais River is asking for, but Ontarians are asking for, and that is: "When is this government going to go into action?"

Industry-funded organizations will still run our waste diversion programs, and could keep running them for a long time. This bill offers no timeline for when the transition to individual producer responsibility will be completed or even when it will begin. My New Democratic colleagues and I support the bill's promise of individual producer responsibility, but we are looking for some clarification, some amendments, something in here that will guarantee the government will actually follow through on their claimed goals in this bill—again, a call to action.

I don't know how this government can sell a bill where the Ministry of the Environment can propose a waste-free Ontario, while the Ministry of Energy orders up a new garbage incinerator requiring a guaranteed 10-year supply of burnable garbage equal to 750,000 tonnes a year. Can someone explain that one to me? I just don't understand that one. I know from previous dealings with the Ministry of Energy, dealing with issues in my riding, and the Ministry of the Environment, they don't seem to talk to each other. The left hand doesn't talk to the right one. But come on, guys, this is one that we need to get right.

Bill 151 does not guarantee that municipal blue box costs will go down, another big concern for the various municipalities across my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin. The provincial government has already downloaded too many costs on to municipalities. For some of you MPPs getting a call or two from your local municipalities, think about the earful I get from mine. I have 37 municipalities that are at their wits' end on their budgets and cannot take any more of these fees—21 First Nations and 15 local services boards. I hear time and time again about the burdens this government is placing on the backs of municipalities and constituents with their continuous downloading of programs, costs and services to municipalities.

Many of the municipalities across Algoma-Manitoulin just can't afford this. They are already struggling with lost revenues and increased costs. They simply can't afford any more fees. This bill must not needlessly add to the burdens on municipalities. The government proposed individual producer responsibility back in 2008 and little has changed. We have waited long enough.

Despite its title, the Waste-Free Ontario Act, it has no legislated goal of a waste-free Ontario. Under individual producer responsibility, producers pay the full cost of end-of-life management of their product and packaging and are free to find creative ways to reduce waste, but under the existing system, both consumers and producers are trapped. Under the existing system, producers have no choice but to work with the stewardship monopolies and have few incentives to find creative ways to reduce waste and packaging and to improve the recoverability of their products. And consumers get stuck with eco fees. We're simply passing on costs without creating incentives for better outcomes.

This government has not advanced or progressed at all on waste management, and we notice. When we look at other jurisdictions like Nova Scotia, Ontario's waste

diversion rates within the industrial, commercial and institutional sectors are lagging. There are significant economic opportunities and environmental benefits from waste reduction, reuse and recycling. I say those words like I've heard them a thousand times from my children. They learn the benefits of recycling, reusing and reducing at a very early stage.

Every time I come home on weekends, I tell the boys: "You're coming from downstairs? Close the lights," and they always close them. Well, not really. I have to remind them: "Close your game. Shut the TV off. Turn the light off in the washroom." If you do this action, it's repetitive. But one of the things they have been participating in is one they remind me of when I go to the washroom and either brush my teeth or shave: "Dad, turn off the water," or "Dad, that cap on the pop bottle can go in the plastic." They're really engaged in the recycling program, and they remind me of my duties.

I remember a time when you used to grab that plastic bottle, throw it in the garbage can and just walk away, whereas now you get a sense that, "Hey, I just did something wrong," so you go back to the garbage can, pull that plastic bottle out and put it in the blue bin like you're supposed to. It's part of our DNA now, and part of my family's. The younger generation seems to have learned this; however, this government has not.

I've been down at the Ontario Good Roads Association and Rural Ontario Municipal Association meetings, as many of you have over the course of the last few days. I am in constant contact and regular communication with all the mayors and councillors of Algoma-Manitoulin. I have heard from them and have also heard from stakeholders across my riding.

We know that the Ontario Waste Management Association has expressed broad support for Bill 151 but cautions about potential issues that could emerge as details are ironed out. Rob Cook, the CEO of OWMA, says, "This is an important step forward for the province today in embracing the move towards a circular economy, which will improve resource efficiency, reduce our environmental footprint, increase productivity, create local jobs and foster economic growth." He goes on to say, "The waste/ resource management sector remains one of the best kept secrets to driving emission reductions and we are pleased the government is acknowledging this."

So we know this. We are hearing from the experts. We need to ensure that this government legislation is actually going to deal with the current problems and create positive change.

I also meet regularly with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has long advocated for extended producer responsibility for waste diversion programs. As I mentioned before when speaking about many discussions with municipalities in my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin, AMO has been concerned about rising costs to municipalities, imposed on them by industry-funded organizations that find ways to avoid paying their traditional 50% share of the cost. We know that AMO would wel-

come legislation that would shift these responsibilities and costs to producers, but it notes that the actual effect of this act will depend on regulations, and that transition is estimated to take about three to five years.

Environmental Defence and Toronto Environmental Alliance have said that they "welcome the strategy for a waste-free Ontario and are very pleased to see Ontario making the explicit link between waste and climate change and committing to a vision for a circular economy where Ontario produces zero waste."

Again, of course they welcome this. Who wouldn't? But what we want is to see something actually happen. For 13 years, there has been no progress.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, in a statement, said, "OFA applauds the waste-free Ontario initiative proposed in Bill 151," noting that one objective of the act is "to reduce waste, and reduce the province's dependency on landfills that are typically located in rural areas."

I meet with these folks often, as well, up north. We know that the cities want to ship their garbage up north—not just garbage; we are closely monitoring and watching what is happening with the nuclear waste discussion. That's a different story, but the premise is the same: again, garbage coming up north. Northern and rural areas are hosts to the waste of the larger urban areas.

0920

The OFA also noted that much will depend on subsequent regulations: "We don't want to be surprised by any unintended consequences impacting Ontario farm businesses. Ontario farmers already participate in recycling programs that involve the recycling of pesticide and fertilizer containers, feed, seed and pesticide bags, plastic bale wrap and many other items used on the farm. Expansion of those programs will be an important development under the proposed act."

Some of my friends over at the Workers Health and Safety Centre whom I speak with on a regular basis in regard to mining issues are hopeful that Bill 151 will result in fewer hazardous materials in the waste stream, noting that while the Toxics Reduction Act requires monitoring and reduction plans, the implementation of these plans is not mandatory.

I'm coming to the end of my notes here this morning. This is a very large bill, a very comprehensive bill. We need to put some meat into this bill because that's what a lot of people across this province are asking for. There's a lot of content in this bill. We need not waste our time anymore with talking about this issue. We need to really address the waste problem that we have.

I think the intentions of the government are good, but, again, I call this government to go into action because their actions are going to be stronger than words. We've got to get this right. My kids are depending on me to get this right. Ontarians are depending on all of us in this room to get this right. We have an opportunity; let's put some meat on the bones and let's make sure that what we do with this bill is not just, once again, another splash and another title that we see in the media that sounds real good but really accomplishes very little.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I cannot resist having an opportunity to respond to my colleague from across the floor, my good friend the member for Algoma-Manitoulin. He referenced the Rural Ontario Municipal Association/Good Roads conference. Like my colleague, I was there for the last two and a half or three days. I met with scores of municipal delegations—it was tremendous—many within the member's riding as well.

What probably needs to be said as well—not referencing specifically the legislation at this very moment—is how optimistic and positive municipal leaders are all across the province about the opportunities that they see moving forward. That's really what that gathering is about: How can we continue to help move the economy forward and deal with issues such as this?

May I say also, specifically related to Bill 151, that while I heard the member's feelings and belief that indeed we need to perhaps provide some amendments, which I'm sure the party will be providing, what I did hear was an overall support for this very important legislation. The fact is that Ontario is showing leadership by taking action to support what we're describing, I think, as a circular economy. That's really, really important.

There is significant stakeholder support for Bill 151, and I'm very pleased that the member for Algoma-Manitoulin is supporting it as well. I know he isn't necessarily speaking on behalf of all the members of the opposition—but we think this is a very important piece of legislation.

May I say, too, that the member referenced how often he and I worked together on a number of issues for each of his communities. That is certainly the case related even to this specific issue. We haven't always been successful, but we work in a positive way all the time to try and improve the communities that both he and I represent, and all across the province of Ontario. I thank him for his comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to offer some comments on those offered by the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. We often get accused of being the same person by legislative security here. I don't know which one is more handsome. I would suggest it's probably the member from the NDP.

He did bring up some very, very good points in his remarks this morning about the fact that not much has changed when it comes to recycling levels in the province of Ontario. In spite of the fact that the current government continues to announce that they're doing more, nothing ever seems to get done. I think recycling levels back in 2004 were at 26% in the province of Ontario, right around the same place that the Premier's approval ratings are at right now—about 26%. But they haven't increased over that time, in spite of all of the talk that we'd heard from various ministers of the crown on how they were going to improve recycling.

Now they've brought forward this bill. It's a good initiative, but there are some items in there that we have serious concerns about. Do we really need to create a team of recycling cops in the province of Ontario? Do we need to create more bureaucracy? We would argue that we need to strip away Waste Diversion Ontario and the bureaucracy that exists there, and allow industry to battle this out on their own. We believe that businesses can advance innovation far quicker than what a government could do. We've seen that in the past. This government, anyway, certainly hasn't been able to advance the markers on this. We believe that if we set the targets, industry will meet them. There's money in this game; there's a lot of money in recycling, and we think there's an opportunity here for businesses to take advantage of that.

All in all, the main point I took away from the member from Algoma-Manitoulin is that we have heard promise after promise after promise, whether it's about recycling or the Ring of Fire, or many other things. They just don't deliver on their promises.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate this morning. I thank my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin.

The concept around this bill, as it relates to a circular economy, is something that should be applauded. It's a novel concept; it's one that I think our economy in general has to move towards. It brings us even further beyond sustainability to an economy that is regenerative. It's something that supports—and has triple net benefits.

This is really complex stuff through an economic system. It really is as sort of simplistic as recycling as we know it. There's garbage in and you recycle it, you retain it, you turn it back into something that can be produced in another fashion and divert that waste from our landfills. We obviously understand that concept, but as it relates to an economy, that's where it gets a lot more complex.

Unfortunately, what we have before us today, for viewers who are tuning in at home, is simply enabling legislation. What that means, to folks that are tuning in, is that it gives the government the legislative ability and framework to, in the future, do something regarding this issue. It's pretty basic stuff; it's not really visionary. It doesn't give a whole lot of details. It doesn't give any targets. It simply says, "This is something that we think we should move towards," and we will applaud the government on that front. However, as legislators, our job is to criticize and scrutinize the mechanics of the bills that are put before the House from the government, and unfortunately, it's difficult to do that because we don't really have any.

Therefore, we look forward to further discussion and a whole lot more consultation, especially when it comes to municipalities, which certainly have borne the brunt of failures in waste diversion in the province for quite some time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to speak to Bill 151. As the member from Algoma-Manitoulin said, in my remarks I said that in the residential sector, 47% of household waste is diverted from the landfill. I made those comments in the light that it's very clear that more needs to be done.

I would like to point out that the Ontario Liberal government—it doesn't matter if it was in 1980 or since 2003 to now—they have always shown leadership when it comes to environmental issues. We all know that Ontario was the first jurisdiction to introduce the Blue Box Program, and it was done under the leadership of a well-regarded member of our caucus and cabinet, the member from St. Catharines, the Honourable James Bradley. Even our current Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Mr. Glen Murray, is very passionate about fighting climate change. Our leader, our Premier, the Honourable Kathleen Wynne, is also very much committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

0930

So you can see there's whole a lot of leadership and there is a broad range of support for this bill. To name a few companies: Unilever, Loblaws, the Canadian Beverage Association, Dell Canada, Tetra Pak Canada and USA, the Ontario Waste Management Association, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, which represents 36,000 family farm businesses—they all support this bill.

Last week, when I was watching television, there was news on CP24 that Ikea, a Sweden-based company, is soon going to announce that if you buy a product from their store and bring it back at the end of the life, you will get store credit. So—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Your time is up.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: —all of the companies are moving in that direction—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. When I say thank you, you sit down.

The member from Algoma-Manitoulin has two minutes.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank my good friend—I always refer to him as a friend—the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. We've often discussed that if it was left to us as far as setting up and fixing things across northern Ontario, we would probably get some stuff done. Unfortunately, he has to report back to someone else, and it kind of prevents things from moving forward.

The one thing that he did quote on is what we heard over at OGRA/ROMA: optimistic and positive comments coming from municipalities. I also heard quite a few questions and some concerns that are coming from them as well, and I hope you heard those issues as well while there.

The member from Prince Edward-Hastings: You pretty well hit the nail on the head as far as the points that I was trying to bring across—the actions, or the inactions of this government, the costs and the fees, and the fact

that we keep hearing promises of deliverance, and there is nothing that is happening. I'll leave it to the viewers to determine who's most handsome between you and me this morning. Anyway, we'll leave it at that.

My good friend the member from Essex, it's always a privilege to be in the House with you. You talked about the circular economy—absolutely. This is something that we need to see come into action. That's essentially what we're calling for from this government. This is enabling legislation, and we see no directive, we see no timeline and we see no targets. We don't see how you're going to be doing this. We see the grandiose idea, but there is no action.

The member from Mississauga-Brampton South: I hear your words. I hear you talking about the Premier, I hear you talking about the minister. But those are words; actions will speak a lot more. That's what Ontarians are asking for and that's what has been lacking. We haven't seen any action. We've seen more promises and more media releases, good-news stories, and no action from this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much.

Applause.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Oh, my God, that's very kind of you. Even a standing ovation, Speaker, from the other side—very nice.

I'm glad to have had an opportunity to join this debate. I think what's really clear from the discussion this morning and the debate this morning, and other debate that's taken place, is that this is a very important subject; there's just no question about it. I think, actually, the quality of the debate this morning as well reflects the fact there's an understanding of how complex it is. I was listening to the member for Essex and his two-minute response and was conscious of exactly what he said: This is really complex.

I hear everything that's being said about our desire, all of us, to do this better—because we need to do exactly that. Again, I get the impression that we're going to have support for this legislation, as we all have a desire to move forward and find some solutions.

The bottom line is, from our perspective, and I think it's a fair perspective, that we are showing leadership by taking action to support what we're describing as a circular economy, a system where ultimately nothing is wasted.

Oh, and by the way, Speaker, I apologize, if I may—and I hope I get permission for this. I'm sharing my time with the member for Ottawa-Orléans—I know it's dodgy—and the Chair of Cabinet, even though I know they wouldn't mind if I spoke for the entire 20 minutes.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: No.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Are you speaking? Have I got the wrong member? We're good. Ottawa-Orléans—have I got an okay for that, Speaker?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. That might have been good if you had done it at the beginning, but that's okay. And thank you to everyone for giving you permission.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Of course, Speaker, you've got to give me permission for that, so thank you very much. I didn't want to forget that. I think that's another reflection of what an important debate this is.

The proposed legislation, as the members know, requires the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to develop and maintain the Waste Free Ontario: Building the Circular Economy strategy. I'm sitting beside the parliamentary assistant to the minister, who I know knows this incredibly well. A draft strategy was of course released when the proposed Waste-Free Ontario Act was introduced this past November, and it really and truly does provide a road map. I think we do need that road map to support that circular economy.

The strategy was clearly developed in response to what we heard from people all across Ontario. That speaks to my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin, as well. And yes, indeed, while we're all working towards positive things, we have our challenges as well. I did hear those things at our meetings that we held.

We certainly heard from people related to this particular legislation about the need to have clear Ontario goals to support that economy—the need to take actions to increase diversion, and the need to measure our progress in achieving those goals. So that draft strategy outlines very clearly, actually, Ontario's goals, which I believe we all share: zero waste in the province and zero greenhouse gas emissions from the waste sector.

The draft strategy is obviously a crucial element in terms of detailing the key actions that will support Ontario's vision and goals, including establishing clear provincial direction, expanding producers' responsibilities for their products and packaging, diverting more waste from disposal, increasing promotion and education, and stimulating markets for recovered materials. The strategy also sets out a series of performance measures, so we will know what is working and where improvements are needed.

So this legislation is pretty important. It will require the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to prepare progress reports at least once every five years, outlining actions taken to achieve the strategy's goals. So those targets will be very much in place. In addition, there is a requirement that the strategy be reviewed at least every 10 years in consultation with stakeholders and the public, and it would be amended as needed. This will very much keep Ontario's actions current, and it will also align our efforts with our key partners.

The key thing that I think needs to be said about this legislation—the important element to it that everyone in this House agrees on is that by enshrining the strategy in legislation and by requiring regular reporting and reviews, the government will be making the strategy an ongoing, inclusive and transparent mechanism to direct actions to support a circular economy for the long term.

Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful to have an opportunity to say a few words, and I'll pass it off, if I may, to my colleague from Ottawa—Orléans.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I'm very proud to rise today to speak about Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act.

Ontario is an incubator of innovation, one that has become not only a leader but an advocate for a circular economy. Just to say what a circular economy is for the folks watching out there: It works to ensure that absolutely nothing goes to waste. Valuable materials that are destined for landfills are instead put back into the economy without negative effects on people or the environment. That is why we have brought forth the Waste-Free Ontario Act.

Ontario's need for clear and concise goals to support a circular economy, increase diversion and measure progress are all mandates given to us by the people of Ontario. That is why I'm honoured to stand today in support of the Waste-Free Ontario Act. Like Ontarians, I want a clear and radiant Ontario, one that yields zero waste and zero GHG emissions; an Ontario that reduces, reuses and recycles, helps mitigate negative effects and keeps waste that would go into landfills out.

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The bill, if passed, would give the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change the authority to conduct reports at least once every five years which seek to outline the actions taken to achieve the strategy's goals. This is a continuation of our commitment to a government that strives for ultimate transparency.

The achievements of our existing program, which has been designed to keep waste out of landfills, are some of the broadest and most comprehensive in North America. However, these cover only 15% of Ontario's waste stream. We aim to increase this number and do better. This is why the government brought forward this bill. Over eight million tonnes of waste is sent to landfills each year and this represents an estimated \$1 billion worth of recoverable materials lost. We would be missing a huge opportunity to generate revenue and create jobs. A 60% recovery rate of materials would generate 13,000 jobs and contribute \$1.5 billion in GDP to Ontario. For businesses, this bill would provide them with the incentive to design long-lasting, reusable and easily recyclable products.

The new ways of reducing waste will also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions that result from landfilling. Working with businesses would be in conjunction with the government's strategy to preserve resources and recover valuable materials from waste lost to landfills. It would also mean a continuation of our commitment to an all-inclusive government.

The public has expressed significant concern on eco fees. Under the current Waste Diversion Act, 2002, mandatory industry funding organizations, or IFOs, have set uniform fees. This bill, if passed, would eliminate the IFOs and the uniform fees that were set by these organizations. Under the proposed legislation, there would be

an open, fair and competitive marketplace that would discourage producers from charging eco fees. But if producers do pass the cost of recycling to the consumers, this would have to follow the rules set out in the Consumer Protection Act.

There are many members in this House who are devoted to the cause of climate change. It is great to see that many here understand that it is vital that we take the necessary action to manage our resources and ultimately preserve our environment.

I hope everyone here will support this bill. Today we are one step closer to a clean Ontario.

I would like to share the rest of my time with the member from St. Catharines.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Chair of Cabinet and minister without portfolio.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm pleased that this bill is where it is at the present time, although I must say it has been a long time getting to this stage.

There are people out there who are observers of political process who are great fans of minority government. Indeed, from time to time, minority government can produce some beneficial results. I must say, however, in the instance of this particular bill, minority government did not work well, largely because one of the opposition parties was intent upon making sure this bill did not pass no matter what changes were proposed, no matter what was said.

From my perspective of being the former Minister of the Environment who first introduced legislation of this kind, I can't recall a piece of legislation that had more consultation than this piece of legislation has had over the years. I can recall meeting personally the members of the ministry and, certainly, committees heard from people. We heard from a variety of people about what should go in a bill of this kind. I think everyone recognized the need for it.

While household recycling has been quite good in the province of Ontario—in other words, you and I in our homes have put things into the blue box and other containers that our municipality allows or suggests that we do so—the industrial and commercial sector, the business sector, was not as good at recycling and recovery and so, as a result, we need this legislation.

Former Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller was instrumental in promoting the need for this legislation through reports that he provided to the Legislature. Indeed, in a somewhat different role, he actually intervened, which is unusual for an Environmental Commissioner, in a very positive way to try to bring the various parties—that's with a small "p," not political parties, although you could say the political parties as well, but the various stakeholders—together to try to develop a consensus. And indeed, we had this.

I will say that the New Democratic Party, the third party in the House, I think was prepared to see the bill proceed through not only the Legislature but legislative committees. The official opposition saw in it reasons to block it from proceeding through the House, and some

are legitimate concerns that are expressed; I'd like to concede that. But I could tell you one thing: We had incorporated ideas from all political parties, including those which were proposed by the official opposition, but it became a moving target. As soon as you addressed one issue that they were satisfied with, they went after another issue.

Now, that's part of the process. In a majority government, there's a better opportunity to move legislation through the House, though I was really hopeful in this case, because I saw interest in all three parties in the House. I was hopeful that that legislation could move forward with the acquiescence, if not the enthusiastic support, of all three parties in the Legislature, but it just got blocked constantly. And there were people out there, who previously would have been annoyed with and considered to be an inconvenience legislation of this kind, who were supportive of it, who ultimately decided that it was needed.

There are many components to this that are very significant. It's interesting that when you bring things to a sanitary landfill—I sound like a former environment minister; now everybody calls it the dump, they don't call it a sanitary landfill. When you bring things to the sanitary landfill, there are not many jobs created in that. There are a lot more jobs that are created through the three Rs of recycling, reuse. I can tell you those jobs are jobs for some people who would not have another job in our society.

I was encouraged to see the private sector moving forward into businesses which indicated you could make money on waste.

The first thing you want to do is make sure you don't create the waste in the first place. Second, you want to reuse it if you possibly can—and some of our ancestors knew how to reuse things very much. I can remember pillowcases which were made from old flour bags and things of that nature. People were quite innovative in those days, I am told by my grandparents.

I think there's a lot that can be done with these materials, so it's great to see businesses that are developing out there to address this issue. They saw an opportunity and are moving forward. But there was a need for legislation for what we call a level playing field. That's what business looks for. When you're dealing with these kinds of matters, first of all, don't surprise them. They want to know what you're going to do, and will you consult—because very often the role of government is not to specifically tell somebody how to achieve goals but, rather, to set those goals or those rules, if you will, and then have them use their own ingenuity in achieving them.

There are some very creative businesspeople out there. I toured many of the plants, I must say, many of the operations out there when I was minister. There was a lot of enthusiasm for this piece of legislation. I was hopeful that it would have passed some time ago because it now means the better part of two years have gone by before this legislation is implemented.

It's interesting that over eight million tonnes of waste is sent to landfills every year. That is a sign of "not success," let's put it that way. That represents approximately \$1 billion worth of recoverable materials lost to landfills in Canada.

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The proposed Waste-Free Ontario Act, if passed by this Legislature, would be the pillar of our government's strategy to preserve resources and recover valuable materials from waste currently lost to landfill. Under the proposed approach, producers would be fully responsible for recovering the resources and reducing the waste associated with their products and packaging. This would provide business with the incentive to design long-lasting, reusable and easily recyclable products that are never discarded or sent to a landfill. Finding ways to reduce waste and reintroduce resources into the economy, we recognize, would reduce greenhouse gas emissions that result from landfilling.

As I indicated, about 47% of Ontario's residential waste is diverted from disposal. The real challenge, certainly, is in the industrial, commercial and institutional sectors that, at this time, divert about 13%, which is simply not satisfactory.

I look back with a good deal of interest on the blue box, because when I was Minister of the Environment back in 1985, I recall that there were some communities out there that had decided that the blue box looked like a good idea. Indeed, it was, and one of my goals at that time—and the goal of the government and, I think, the goal of the Legislature—was to see the Blue Box Program right across the province of Ontario. So we implemented the program, indeed, right across Ontario.

It was interesting watching, in the early days, children teaching adults how to divert waste. An adult would go to throw something in the garbage and often a fairly young child, aged nine or 10, might say to the adult, "No, that goes in the blue box." Now we have a number of different containers that enable people to not throw things in a landfill but have them used in a different way. I think that's very positive.

One side story that I want tell: Students ask us if they can have any influence on the government process or political process. I remember a girl who was a student at Grantham High School. She wrote to me and said, "This Blue Box Program is great, but we don't have it in schools." As a result of that letter to me in my capacity as Minister of the Environment, we developed a program called STAR, Student Action for Recycling. To this day, I'm grateful to that girl who took the opportunity to write about that. I think it's a lesson for all out there that when good ideas come forward, if governments are smart, they will certainly proceed with those ideas.

I think the framework is here. Members have mentioned that there's a regulatory framework yet to come, and I hope we have input from everybody on that regulatory framework. I think this is a very progressive piece of legislation that, if passed by this Legislature, all members of the Legislature can be proud of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's always entertaining and I always enjoy listening to the deputy House leader and the minister without portfolio.

Just to clarify things, we will, in fact, be supporting the bill, but we will be advocating for some changes. Of course, you may not want to hear some of our changes, but I'd just like to establish four of them in which we firmly believe—because we have been advocates, as well, for the Waste-Free Ontario Act.

First of all, we think that there needs to be established a clear legislative time frame to eliminate every single—brace yourself—Liberal eco tax program.

Secondly, we need to scrap the Liberal's eco tax agency, the worst—that was a Freudian slip—the Waste Diversion Ontario.

Thirdly, we also feel that we need to drop all the plans to create a force of local waste cops to police recycling bins and garbage cans across the province.

Lastly—yes, it's been a big issue—red tape: We need to cut a lot of the red tape that we believe, on this side, as the official opposition, increases costs for Ontarians and, of course, impedes the environmental protection in our province.

These changes, we feel, will protect Ontario's taxpayers and, of course, our environment as well.

We as PCs have long championed the plan to increase recycling and to reduce waste through innovation and competition among businesses in the private sector. Our plan, of course, would be very measurable and would set recycling targets for businesses, establish environmental standards and enforce the rules.

Those are some of the key elements we feel need to be incorporated to improve this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: As I was listening to the debate, the minister without portfolio talked about children and about teaching the next generation, learning from children, and about the letter that was written to him and how that made a lot of sense.

I think what makes a lot of sense is that we need to educate the public at large, and especially our children, so that they can educate the adults. When it comes from kids, for some reason, we do pay attention to what they say because really, they have the right idea, and there's no wrong intention when a child expresses an idea or an opinion about something. So congratulations to that young girl who wrote to the minister. He acted upon it because it was the right thing to do.

We're talking about the Waste-Free Ontario Act, Bill 151, today. Many members have talked about how there's a vision here. We all agree with that vision. We all agree with a green Ontario. We all agree with conservation. People actually want to conserve; they want a better environment for the next generation. But we do have concerns. A lot of this bill, as we've talked about, is left up to regulation, and there are no timelines. So it

would be interesting, once that actually all happens—it would be great to have it come back here and let's see what it actually looks like.

I do want to ask this government, though—they're talking about a waste-free Ontario, and they're also mentioning the garbage, 750,000 tonnes a year, that we have in Ontario, but the Ministry of Energy is also talking about incineration. I'd like to have some clarification on why we're discussing a waste-free Ontario but then talking about incineration. Incineration does not help the pollutants in the air; there are many studies about that. If anyone could respond to that later in the debate, I'd really appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Brampton South-Mississauga.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Mississauga-Brampton South, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Oh, I'm sorry.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It's okay; it happens. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a privilege to speak to Bill 151. It's quite remarkable that when the bill was developed, we received a lot of support from the retail and producer sector. What we heard from people across Ontario was very clear that that transition to the existing programs should be in an orderly fashion and smooth.

Bill 151 would be based on four principles: (1) the government would lead the overall transition process; (2) each program would have a customized transition process; (3) there would be huge stakeholder consultations; and (4) the Blue Box Program should not be interrupted at all.

Bill 151 would allow existing waste diversion programs to continue until they are transitioned to the new one. This bill will facilitate the smooth transition of all the existing waste diversion programs to a new producer responsibility model.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you to the member from Brampton South-Mississauga.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Mississauga-Brampton South.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm sorry about that. It's a major problem.

The member from Dufferin-Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Or Caledon-Dufferin; whatever you prefer, Speaker, because you're in charge.

I wanted to speak very specifically about ICI—industrial, commercial and institutional—because there seems to be a bit of a whipping happening in the ICI sector: the suggestion that they are not doing an effective job of recycling.

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I'm going to tell you a very brief story. I am very closely involved with some municipalities that are trying to proactively do a lot of recycling. I'm sure most of us are familiar with household hazardous waste days in our various municipalities. It is, in fact, not available to our ICI sector. Even things that are not part of their manu-

facturing process—fluorescent tubes, printer cartridges, old computers—they are not allowed to bring it into the household hazardous waste days. I think that would be a very simple and easy solution. If you want to bump up your numbers and have that 25% number finally get a little higher, you should start looking at allowing ICI to put in, not the stuff that they're using for their manufacturing—but just the fact that they are part of the municipality, paying their taxes, and yet still cannot participate in household hazardous waste. It's a very easy fix.

In the example that I was trying to help, they were actually told, "Those fluorescent tubes, you're not allowed to take them to the household hazardous waste," even though you could as a homeowner. "Just break them and throw them in the garbage." What kind of message are we sending to our ICI sector, who are proactively trying to recycle and trying to get this stuff back into the stream, when we're saying, "Because you're ICI, we don't want your stuff"? It's a terrible message to send.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): One of the three speakers has two minutes.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I appreciate the comments and suggestions that have been offered by those from all three political parties in the House.

There was one reference made to incineration. At one time, they used to talk about the four Rs. Up until the mid-1980s, they talked about the four Rs. They would say, "Well, the best one is going to be 'reduce,'" so you don't produce waste in the first place. The second R, after you reduce, is how can you reuse the product completely? That's what many of our ancestors were able to do with some success. The third was "recycle," and the fourth they referred to as "recovery." Recovery was removed from that, with a good deal of justification, because it wasn't really fitting the category of diversion.

Now, there have been very few examples of incineration in recent years. I can recall being in a court case in the city of Detroit where I had to answer on behalf of Ontario because we were objecting to an incinerator in Detroit which was going to use electrostatic precipitators instead of scrubber baghouse technology. In the court, the authority that wanted to put this in tried to say that Ontario did not have clean hands, but in fact, any new incineration process in Ontario would have to use scrubber baghouse technology. So we ended up being part of that particular case.

It was the first time I'd ever been in a court. Mr. Speaker, the judge actually says, "You must answer the question." I had been a cabinet minister, recognizing that you don't always give a definitive answer to questions in the House, and here I was before the court being compelled to give a very definitive answer. It was a shocking situation for me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. Did I get that right?

Mr. Jim McDonell: You got it right. It's a first. Maybe not you, Speaker. I'm just a little rattled because

they were talking about being forced to tell the truth on the other side.

It's a pleasure to stand up and offer remarks on Bill 151, an attempt by this government to bring Ontario to levels of recycling and waste diversion that we see in other provinces and jurisdictions.

Ontario's stuck in a situation where only a quarter of the recyclable materials are actually diverted from landfill. Much of the blame for this failure rests on the shoulders of this government, who have burdened municipalities and recyclers with red tape while ignoring the facts.

Recycling and landfilling are two faces of the same coin—turning one person's waste into revenue. In the case of recycling, it's a question of collecting waste that has a residual value to it, converting it into a form that can be sold for reprocessing, and delivering it to a customer. For landfilling, you would add steps to ensure that recyclable waste is removed to maximize this expensive resource.

It is absolutely important to highlight that neither of these processes is free. There is a cost involved at each and every step, including capital costs, such as property, machinery and warehousing, and operating costs such as insurance, labour, hydro, marketing and machine fuel. You can't look at waste diversion and recycling exclusively through the lens of the Waste Diversion Act or other waste-related legislation. It is an economic ecosystem operating in an environment where commodity prices, including those for recycled materials, are volatile and where government policy can make or break a business.

In my own riding, I visited a large landfill site. When I compare it back to our own township, they were looking at receiving—they use methane to produce some electricity. There was an excess of gas. Any of that gas, they were forced to flare off. They would like to use that for electricity. It would make sense. It's a carbon that goes into the atmosphere, which is something we're trying to cut back. They couldn't get permission from this government—it was taking months and years—to develop more electricity. You could say, "Well, maybe we don't need the electricity," but, at the same time, we're setting up 300 windmills in the same township for electricity.

Now, the flaring off, and the gas—you can control the time of use to some extent. You would be able to produce this when the costs are highest or, I guess, when the electricity is in demand, as opposed to the windmills that produce all the time and they're buying the power whether they need it or not. There's a clear example of a step this government could take to actually lower their electricity rates and get rid of carbon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the member to stick to the bill. You're off onto hydro and turbines. That's not really about waste diversion. Can you get back to that, please?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: Thanks, Speaker. I'll get back to it.

I guess it is all about our local landfill site that is having some problems. Really, their job is to reduce the

amount of waste they have—the recycling. They also had a great program where they had a falcon that was used to keep the seagulls down—a pet falcon that they were very proud of. It was a requirement of the government. Something that was interesting: In their own landfills—we have a number of them at the municipal level—that was not something that was required.

It just speaks to how there are many other regulations that could be in place that would actually develop an integrated plan. The waste management is part of it, but also what's left; there's more to divert. In this case here, the methane gas could easily have been diverted, but we have somebody who's waiting for permission. The application is there, but, of course, it's waiting to be acted on.

There is a market for post-consumer goods that are ready to return into the economy. However, the trend over the past two years has seen prices tumble. Here are some examples: The composite index for scrap metals has dropped by 36% in the last two years; the index for waste paper lost about 12% since its 2015 peak; tire and rubber is down 14% over the past two years; and recycled plastics are down 6%.

These price decreases can only mean two things: It can become uneconomical to collect recycling, or, at least, it will become uneconomical to produce the materials for reuse. This market doesn't follow the dynamics of the public sector where shortfalls can be covered by taxpayers' dollars. If a recycled material processor can't make money, they simply close down. It stands to reason that these commodity prices are as susceptible to the end of the commodity super-cycle as any other raw material, which means that the lower prices may be here to stay. If and when the world's worst recyclers catch up with us, and maybe even overtake us, we can expect the current price of post-consumer materials worldwide to fall even further. It is an elementary question of supply and demand.

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There are, of course, two approaches the government can take in a situation where business profitability and jobs in the green economy are at stake. Governments can, as the Liberals have done on many occasions, intervene by picking winners and losers and attempting to direct the recycling market, usually without giving much consideration to global market demands. In doing so, governments utilize a one-size-fits-all approach that ignores local factors, such as the cost of collecting waste or the proximity to a processing facility or final markets. One of the main end-users—manufacturing—has been decimated by similar failed policies of this government. This particular course of action is favoured by governments that treasure photo opportunities and feel-good initiatives above sustainable and effective public policy. It inevitably results in the inefficient use of local and national resources.

Bill 151 is the perfect example of this kind of bad policy-making. Out of the provisions of this bill, the Liberal government intends to create a system whereby they can write a policy statement and impose its obli-

gations on industry. It is unclear what particular aspects of the waste cycle the policy statements will affect and how the government intends to enforce them. To be honest, the public doesn't even know whether the Liberals will write any policy statements at all. Once a policy statement comes from the ministry, however, the government intends to apply its principles to all industries and expects them all to comply. This direction might include specific requirements for packaging, labelling and distribution and affect the other steps in the supply chain and the waste cycle.

This particular made-in-Ontario approach could have a logical justification, if most goods Ontarians consumed were made in Ontario and our market could use its size to force producers to adapt to our standards. This, however, is not the case. According to the Ministry of Finance's January data sheet, in 2014 the province imported \$356 billion worth of goods and services and exported \$370 billion. Overall, we have an affluent and sizable consumer market, especially within a Canadian context. Zooming out to just our NAFTA partners, however, reveals that our market size is smaller than the US states of California, New York, Florida and Texas. We can't compete with the purchasing power of the 300 million neighbours south of our border.

In 2014, our province imported, according to Statistics Canada, \$295 billion in merchandise. Our imports constitute a large proportion of our GDP, since consumer spending on imports is included in the GDP calculation. The government of Ontario expects to force multinational companies to comply with the Ontario requirements for the sake of selling in our market. Depending on how detailed and onerous these requirements are, we could be looking at a tailored, made-in-Ontario regulatory framework for everything from packaging to distribution. Some companies may be dependent on Ontario consumption and will comply, although I don't expect that to be a very large number. For many others, Ontario's massive red tape and unrealistic directives will warrant an examination of whether it's worthwhile to continue to supply their products to our markets or, at the very least, raise prices above those of our neighbours to pay for the new scheme.

There can be three outcomes when a company undertakes such a step. First, they can choose to dedicate a supply line to Ontario-compliant products different from their larger supply lines to other markets. This is far from a victory, as it diverts resources and creates additional costs in terms of labour, space and expertise to ensure continued compliance.

Second, the company can decide to pull out of the Ontario market altogether and mitigate their losses through more effective marketing in either the markets that they already have a presence in or in attempting to enter new markets.

Third, the company can spin off an Ontario-centred subsidiary designed exclusively to comply with the ministry's policy statements. This arrangement, again, misallocates resources by adding incorporation, labour,

transportation and compliance costs to the supply chain, driving up prices for Ontario consumers.

Last week, the Minister of the Environment and the Premier of Saskatchewan had a bit of a fight over the new carbon-based pricing, where they said that it was an unfair advantage if they were forced to follow through on this. This is an example of somebody that's interested in our competitiveness with our neighbouring province that really doesn't compete with us in any way. We don't sell oil, basically; we don't have potash. So we're not worrying about the bigger picture, which is our neighbour to the south that really competes with us in manufacturing, and we aren't competitive. We need to look at the red tape. It really is an example of a minister who is worried about one small sector of the economy but he's not worried about the overall.

I guess, Speaker, you're giving me the wave that this is the time to sit down and continue another day. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know what's going to happen. I'm going to ask for all members' indulgence as there is a large number of people who want to stand up to introduce guests because of the circumstances that we find ourselves in today. I'm going to ask you to do the introduction without any editorial, and we will get through all of your guests. My intention would be to remind members that the Speaker usually introduces former members.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Julia Munro: It gives me great pleasure to recognize Subahini Srikantha, who is here from my riding for the model Parliament reception.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to welcome some friends from my region of Essex: Mayor Ron McDermott; Bill Parr; Arlene Parr; Councillor Bill Caixeiro; Sheri Dzudovich; Rebecca Robinson; Joann Myer; Ethan Robinson; and Melanie Paul Tanovich. They're here today to fight the closure of Harrow high school. They braved the weather to come up. We appreciate them being here.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to welcome the civic engagement volunteering activities club from my riding of Don Valley West. I just want to read their names: Dario Mendez; Aadil Shaik; Will Randall; Ian Hayward; Mia Tucker; Amelia Lin; Nelka Jankechova; Olivia Lasanowski; Riane Jin-Hee Lee; Sanjay Suganthan; Catherine Chen; Angie Luo; Hana Hadley; Rachel Quon; Kaafi Hamid; Heather Coyne; Rie Montgomery; Rick Mahoney; and Dewin Swann.

These are very engaged volunteers in Don Valley West, and we welcome them.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome the public affairs students from Seneca College, taught by my good

friend Professor Jon Olinski, to question period this morning.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to welcome a student who's here from my riding for the Ontario model Parliament: Seamus McKenna. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to welcome some members of our Ontario oil and gas sector: Hugh Moran, executive director of the Ontario Petroleum Institute; David Thompson, the chief executive officer of Northern Cross; Frank Kuri from Dundee Energy; David McLean, the president of Riverbend Consulting; and geologist Ian Colquhoun. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: In the public gallery this morning, I would like to welcome, from the riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex, page Delaney Mastronardi's father, Domenic, and his mother—her grandmother, known as Nonna—Ascenzina Mastronardi. Benvenuti.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome Jennifer McIntyre, Suzanne Lesnowski, Lila Fraser and Alex Robinson to Queen's Park today. Welcome.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Joining us in the west gallery today is a good friend of mine, and many members of the Legislature: Bruce Davis, former chair of the Toronto District School Board and owner of Gananoque Brewing Co.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: [*inaudible*] Ryerson student working in my office, Chelsea Goberdhan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to welcome some students from Oakville who are here with us today for the 2016 Ontario model Parliament: Evangeline Mann; Henry Mann; Nicolas Scarcelli; and Alvin Leung. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Today, page captain Richard Fan is joined by his mother, Cherry Liu, and father, Jeffrey Fan. They're in the public gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. David Oraziotti: I'd like to welcome Karlee Reece, a student from my riding in Sault Ste. Marie, to the Ontario model Parliament.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce Jason Rohfrisch, John Metzger and Will Patterson from my riding. They're here for the model Parliament.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm very pleased to welcome my two guests who are here today to visit Queen's Park: my very good friend Ingrid Läderach Steven, the owner of the beautiful chocolate store called Swiss-Master, and Jaclyn Hawkins, who is a rising student visiting me here today at Queen's Park. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to welcome one of my constituents, Peyton Horning from Merrickville-Wolford, who is here for the Ontario model Parliament. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'd like to welcome a new intern: Irena Jury, from the Akron, Ohio, internship program.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to introduce today in the House Maya Joy Lindstrom Par-

kins, a student from Davenport attending today's model Parliament.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I would like to introduce Darren Summersby, who is here from Nipissing for the model Parliament.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm delighted to welcome Zachary Piette and Alexandra Pummer, who are here today for the Ontario model Parliament, representing London West.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to introduce Alex Hu, a former page, who is here for the Ontario model Parliament for the great riding of Oak Ridges-Markham.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to welcome Julia Brunet from my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, who is here for the model Parliament. She is also a former page here at the Legislature. Welcome, Julia.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to welcome a former page, a member of the Windsor-Tecumseh riding. Evan Tanovich is up with the model Parliament people today. His mother, Melanie, is over here in the gallery as well.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's my pleasure to welcome Dominic Jayetileke, who is from my riding of Scarborough-Guildwood, here for Ontario's model Parliament.

Speaker, if you would indulge me, please, I'd like to also welcome the Consul General of Jamaica, Mr. George Wilks, given that's the place of my birth; and also C.J. Augustine-Kanu, who is the daughter of Dr. Jean Augustine, Consul General of Grenada. I know there are many others to be introduced by you, Speaker.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Today I want to welcome to the assembly Brian Popowich, who is page captain Jessie Popowich's father. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm very happy to welcome a good friend, Larry Rose, formerly of Kitchener Centre but now choosing to live in St. Paul's. Welcome.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome a former page, Olivia Fox, who is also the granddaughter of a former member here, Gary Fox, as part of the model Parliament. Welcome.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I wanted to also introduce today here in the House Bill Moniz and Lino Torrado from OMNI, who here doing a documentary to be aired later on OMNI. Thank you and welcome.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to introduce Maddy Davidson from the great riding of Oxford county. She's participating in the 2016 Legislative Assembly of Ontario model Parliament and I want to welcome Maddy to Queen's Park.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great pleasure to introduce representatives of the Canadian Men's Health Foundation: Order of Canada recipient and founder Dr. Larry Goldenberg; President Wayne Hartrick; Canadian Olympic gold medallist in rowing, Adam Kreek, also a spokesperson; and Rod Elliot of Global Public Affairs. Thank you. Welcome, gentlemen.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I would also like to welcome, from my riding of Oshawa, Jacob Ebbs, who is participating in this year's model Parliament. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to welcome Diana Eqbe, who is the new general assistant in my office, joining us today. Welcome.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm also pleased to introduce Lachandra Jordan, similarly joining the assembly from the state of Ohio as an intern. She has a particular interest in the sharing economy, and the poor young woman got stuck with Hudak. Welcome to the assembly and good luck in my office.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I need to correct my record for Hansard. The Consul General for Jamaica is Lloyd Wilks.
1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Not that we haven't mentioned it, but we have with us in the public galleries today 95 students from across the province, participating in the third annual Legislative Assembly of Ontario Model Parliament. Please join me in welcoming all of them, including an individual from my own riding. I'll just leave it at that.

I'd also like to thank all parties in the House for participating in making the model Parliament work the way it does. Congratulations and have a great weekend.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We also have with us in the Speaker's gallery a delegation of consuls general and members of the consular corps representing 11 Caribbean countries. Please join me in welcoming our guests from the Caribbean.

Now I would ask all members to please join me in welcoming the family of the late Derwyn Shea, MPP for High Park–Swansea during the 36th Parliament, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. His partner, Christine Schubert, cousin Lorraine Clarkson and friends Sarah Davies, Janet Carwardine and France Cass are here to pay tribute. Welcome, and we're glad you're here with us today.

Also along with us to pay tribute in the Speaker's gallery are former members: Mr. David Turnbull, MPP for York Mills during the 35th and 36th Parliaments and MPP for Don Valley West during the 37th Parliament; Mr. David Warner, Speaker during the 35th Parliament; Mr. John Parker, MPP for York East during the 36th Parliament; Mr. Steve Gilchrist, MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments; Mr. Murad Velshi, MPP for Don Mills during the 34th Parliament, and his wife, Mariam. Welcome to our former members who are here today.

DERWYN SHEA

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader on a point of order.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I believe that you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Derwyn Shea, former member for High Park–Swansea, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute. Do we agree? Agreed. Thank you.

The member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour and a privilege to rise today and remember the life of the Rev. Canon Derwyn Spencer Shea. This was a gentleman who was born in 1937. In fact, his elder brother was shot down in the Second World War, and Derwyn himself would go back to England to recognize that event every second year of his life.

He was first and foremost a pastor. He was first and foremost a Christian, and he lived for his faith and through his faith. In fact, it was his faith that brought him here and took him to city council in Toronto. He was ordained in 1966 as an Anglican priest, and he worked in the dioceses of Saskatchewan, Algoma and Toronto. He founded the Eastview Neighbourhood Association for latchkey youth in Toronto's east end and was co-author of the benchmark East Toronto Deanery Study.

He was the first Canadian ever to receive a fellowship from the Academy of Parish Clergy and was a member of the city of Toronto's planning board from 1972 to 1982, including four years as chairman, when he was elected in his first attempt as senior alderman in Toronto's ward 1. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that it was Derwyn who fought to change the name from "alderman," because it clearly left women out, to "councillor."

As a member of council, he served with a number of agencies, boards and commissions. He was variously a police commissioner and a commissioner of Toronto Hydro, as well as president of the Canadian National Exhibition, governor of Exhibition Place and chair at the O'Keefe Centre. He served on a number of hospital boards: Toronto General, Toronto Western, Princess Margaret and Runnymede Chronic Care.

In the 1995 provincial election, Shea defeated New Democratic Party cabinet minister and incumbent Elaine Ziemba and became a member of Mike Harris's caucus for the next four years, serving as parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and then as parliamentary assistant for citizenship, culture and recreation.

He retired from the Legislature in 1999 and returned to his position as rector of St. Clement's Anglican church in Riverdale. In 2000, Shea initiated, and was later elected founding chair of, the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians. I'll talk about that more in a minute.

I want to share something with the assembly that Steve Paikin wrote about Derwyn Shea. He said that, although Shea was a man of faith with modest ambitions, it did not "mean he was a shrinking violet. During the Harris government's first term in office, the finance minister, Ernie Eves, was considering bringing in a new 'market value assessment' property tax system for Ontario's cities. The gist of the new system was to raise property taxes on older homes which hadn't been reassessed in decades and therefore were paying a ... lower share....

"When Shea discovered what that would mean for his constituents in the west end of old Toronto, he hit the roof. He marched into Eves's office and gave him an earful about how seniors in his ward would have to sell

their homes because they could no longer afford to pay their property taxes.

“Given that he was a clergyman, I asked”—this is Steve Paikin—“Shea how intense the conversation with Eves got. The answer was ‘plenty.’

“‘Was there any profanity used?’ I asked.

“‘Yes, by both of us,’ he replied.

“Shocked at the notion of an Anglican Church minister and a provincial finance minister using longshoreman’s language, I asked one more question.

“‘Did you use the F-word?’”

Shea replied, “‘Not unless you mean ‘fundamental.’”

One of his most enduring accomplishments while representing what is now my riding was in getting the Humber River in Toronto’s west end designated as a historic river. We’re thankful for that, I can tell you.

“‘It was a really exciting moment to get that through Parliament,’ Shea said. There were long negotiations but eventually his private member’s bill passed. ‘I’m very proud of that.... It gives us the chance to really make sure that river goes through reclamation and gets improved. That really made my day.’”

I also want to highlight the fact that he was one of the founding members—as you will hear, I’m sure, from others—of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians. This goes back to Reverend Shea’s faith. Really, first and foremost, he was a pastor, and in his retirement he really was a pastor to all of us here in starting that organization.

I want to say thank you on behalf of the New Democratic Party and our leader Andrea Horwath for the life of Derwyn Shea lived here, in part, in this assembly, and to his family for sharing it with us.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tributes.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I’m delighted to have the opportunity to pay tribute to the Reverend Canon Derwyn Spencer Shea, who, while he served in the Legislature for only one term, had a profound effect on the deliberations both in this House and within the Progressive Conservative caucus.

I first met Derwyn Shea, that I can recall, in 1995, when he introduced himself to me and to several colleagues in the Legislature upon his first appearance in the chamber. It was in his usual jovial, friendly manner, which all who knew him can recall to this very day. He was the kind of individual who made a good first impression and the kind of person who always had a cordial greeting whenever he encountered you, whether it was in the House, in a legislative committee, in the hallway or on the streets of Toronto.

Derwyn had a dual role to play in his community as both an Anglican priest and a politician, first at the municipal level, as has been mentioned, and as a member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. In doing so, he had to walk what Toronto Sun columnist John Downing referred to as a tightrope in a column in April 1999, when Derwyn announced his retirement from provincial politics.

I always wondered why, being such a progressive individual, he chose the party he did. Some people said to me that in those days the Anglican Church was really the Conservative Party at prayer. I discounted that completely because I never thought it to be the case. But certainly, he was very much loved by members of all parties in this House and not simply by his own friends within the Progressive Conservative Party.

1050

There was much speculation—and I assure you, it was only that—that Reverend Shea was leaving because of dissatisfaction with his government’s policies or fear of defeat because the riding boundaries were changing. I suspect the real reason was to devote his full time to his first calling, that being his role in the Anglican Church. He truly did take that role so very seriously.

Without a doubt, there are always inevitable conflicts that arise when the teachings of the church clash with political imperatives of a government, and knowing Derwyn as a compassionate, caring individual with a strong commitment to Christian values and principles, he very likely came to the conclusion that he should devote all of his attention to his duties and his responsibilities as a priest. I’m certain that his decision was welcomed, if not by his party, which loved him very much and which found him to be a good member of the Legislature, by the Anglican Church, which wanted his full time and attention because he was so instrumental in its success in Toronto.

I think it’s safe to say that Derwyn was not afraid to ruffle feathers or dissent from the prevailing view, as he demonstrated in embracing the call for change in the title of local city politician from “alderman” to “councillor”; or when he suggested that the CNE needed a more multicultural flair to make it a truly national attraction; or for taking independent stands on issues before the Toronto Police Commission—and he did that quite vociferously and openly.

There’s a cat story to this, as well. The headline says, “MPP Joins Cat Fight: Shea Backs Tigger in a Tea Shop.” Only the Sun could come up with these particular headlines.

“Tigger, the feline fighting the law ruling he poses a health risk by curling up in his owner’s Say Tea shop, found an ally in his local MPP yesterday.

“‘I’m proud to wear Tigger’s colours,’ said Derwyn Shea, MPP for Tigger’s High Park–Swansea riding. ‘He’s a terrific cat,’ said Shea, who claims to be ‘owned’ by four cats himself. ‘And I say “Tigger, come on home and get in your window and enjoy the sunshine”,’ he said....

“Shea has asked Jim Wilson”—who was around at that time and still is—“the Minister of Health, to review the regulations prohibiting Tigger’s catnapping in the shop.

“If the regulation can’t be changed, Shea promised Tigger’s owner, Wendy Winship, he would present her 2,000-signature petition to the Legislature.”

So Derwyn was prepared to take on the cats, as well.

When you review the various agencies, boards and commissions that Derwyn Shea was part of, you understand his love for and his devotion to his community and so many good causes in that community. Whether it was the Toronto planning board, municipal council, the O'Keefe Centre, the Variety Club, the Ugandan Relief and Development Organization, the Hospital for Sick Children Herbie Fund, the Eastview Neighbourhood Association for latchkey youth, the boards of Toronto General, Princess Margaret and the Runnymede Chronic Care Facility, Derwyn was prepared to dedicate his time, talent and enthusiasm. For that, all of us in this province should be extremely thankful.

On a personal note, I applaud Derwyn for his distaste for government gambling policies, a cause with which I'm in sympathy with the former MPP for High Park–Swansea. For those of you who have been around for a while and had to listen to me drone on about the evils of gambling—there were members of the Legislature from different parties who did that—I was really glad when Derwyn took that cause on, as well.

The Reverend Canon Derwyn Shea demonstrated his commitment to the ministry—this is rather interesting—by bequests in his estate to the Diocese of Toronto to establish a fund for the assistance of parish clergy and to Wycliffe College to fund a chair of urban ministry in memory of his late wife.

For many present members of the Legislature, the last time we saw him was at a gathering of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians, an organization he founded and led with great dedication and commitment. He may no longer be with us in the mortal sense, but his irrepressible spirit and ready smile will remain forever in all of our memories.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus in tribute to our friend and colleague the Reverend Canon Derwyn Shea. Welcome to friends here as part of this tribute.

I'll confess, when I first got here and I sat in the very back corner, Derwyn Shea scared me. He was an intimidating fellow. I remember getting here and trying to get the measure of the characters I was about to serve with. Norm Sterling was very professorial; he was always carrying around a book or a newspaper. Jim Wilson was a young firebrand with a beautiful set of hair. David Turnbull, who joins us today, the former member for York Mills, was our party whip. He had this clipped British accent, so, to me, he was some kind of Bond villain making sure we were all in place. And Ted Arnott, well, he still looks the same. But Derwyn intimidated me. He had this gravitas, this authority to him. He was well read, well educated, principled, good at his job and he tended to get his way.

My colleagues from St. Catharines and Parkdale–High Park did an excellent job talking about his accomplishments here, but let me tell you a little bit about how he got that way. He entered the Anglican ministry at 30 years of age after having served in the military and with Bell Telephone.

As is customary when you start out in the church, his early parishes were off the beaten track, initially in rural Saskatchewan and then—to my colleague from Nickel Belt—Capreol. Let me tell you a bit about that. When he got to Capreol he found that his new, small, white-frame parish church required renovations. He commissioned one of the finest stained glass artists in the country to create a new, beautiful stained glass window to be installed right over the front door of the parish. Years later, Derwyn took pride in having negotiated on behalf of the church probably the lowest price the artist had ever agreed to in his career.

Later he was called to serve as the parish priest in the church of St. Clement on Jones Avenue in Toronto. The member from Toronto–Danforth nods, knowing the parish and the neighbourhood. The changing demographics of the area at the time had depleted the traditional congregation and Reverend Derwyn Shea had his marching orders. He was to supervise the orderly closure of the church altogether, but those of us who knew Derwyn knew that he would have other plans. He reached out to the newly arrived ethnic communities in the neighbourhood. He was warm to the existing congregation and he built a new congregation comprised primarily of members who had not been made to feel welcome before. The church became robust and successful. For his achievement, Derwyn received a personal commendation from the Archbishop of Canterbury, confirmed in a personal letter that remained framed and mounted on Derwyn's wall for the rest of his life.

It was Derwyn's passion for service to people and his desire to contribute to the well-being of the community that shortly led him into political life, first at the municipal level in Toronto, starting with service as a member of volunteer municipal boards. In 1972, he was appointed to the then city of Toronto planning board as part of a clean sweep by the new mayor at the time, David Crombie. In due course, he was elected to Toronto city council and then Metro council, all the while continuing to lead Sunday services at St. Clement's church.

In Derwyn's first municipal election in the early 1990s, he was returned to Metro council, holding off a challenge by an aspiring young politician, actually a law school classmate of the Honourable Tony Clement, a young fellow by the name of David Miller.

At Queen's Park, Derwyn recognized that he was now playing a team sport. He never lost track of which team he played for but he never lost sight of the important work that we do.

Members who were here at the time will also remember that in 1995 there were actually 82 of us. So while I was in the far back corner, there was a significant group of Conservative MPPs on that side. They called themselves "the rump." That's where Derwyn sat. It didn't take Derwyn long to realize that his seat was caught on camera at the opening of each daily session as the mace was paraded in through the front doors. He saw the benefit that came from that happy circumstance. Whether Derwyn had business before the House or whether he had

House duty or not, he made sure that every day he was in his seat as the mace came by. Similarly, he would slip in and slip out as the mace made its exit.

1100

So it's no surprise to you that I mentioned the rump. It was a matter of time before Derwyn became the leader of the PC rump. He might have even come up with the name; I'm not sure. He would produce a regular rump newsletter that he would post on the wall of the caucus office, and he'd set out the causes of various kinds, political and otherwise, that the members of the rump purported to advance. Members of the Harris cabinet who would have been surviving question period in the day would then get battered back in the caucus room if they had crossed a member of the rump.

My colleague Mr. Bradley mentioned Reverend Canon Shea's opposition to gambling. When the initial plan was to put VLTs in bars, restaurants and 30-some casinos, he was successful, and not just behind closed doors. He stood up publicly and voiced his opposition. I think he was part of the reason why we pulled that back. Eventually slots at racetracks—on which Derwyn said, "Look, I'm a realist. I know they're not going to the racetrack on Sunday to go to church."

The mutual devotion of Derwyn and his wife Julia was an inspiration to all married couples. The two were gracious hosts to guests far and wide, and their annual Boxing Day open house was legendary. Each year they flung their doors open to members of the community, friends and neighbours—a who's who of all the celebrities, journalists, government officials, politicians and political activists who had crossed Derwyn's path over his many years of political activity. Even Liberal and NDP members were known to stop by from time to time with free admission, on the explicit understanding that no one present would rat them out to their caucus colleagues when the Legislature resumed a few weeks later.

This brings me to my last thing I want to recognize for Derwyn on what he did for all members of this House. As my colleagues rightly said, he never allowed political differences to become personal in any way, shape or form. He respected any member regardless of party affiliation who he believed had chosen a political life with a genuine intention to advance a cause of a better world and to share their perspective on how we can best work together to achieve that better world.

He was deeply troubled, Speaker, by the suicide of Hans Daigeler, an MPP from the Ottawa area who tragically committed suicide after having lost office in 1995. With that terrible experience in mind, he set out and formed a group to work across party lines that became the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians. It was formally recognized historically as legislation in the House by being the first bill written by committee. In those days you couldn't have co-signers for bills, so he had all-party support in committee. Because he was the Chair at the time, the member for Scarborough East's name was actually on the bill, but Derwyn brought it forward with support from Liberals and NDP. They con-

tinued to work hard and support and create fellowship among former parliamentarians and forge friendships and alliances for alumni of this House, for others across Canada and now internationally.

One of Derwyn's great ambitions for that is achieved. Former parliamentarians go to university campuses to talk about public policy, to talk about the life and to inspire other young people to join us here one day as MPPs or as staff. There's no doubt, Speaker, that sadly, over time—I think in my 20 years my more veteran colleagues would probably agree that the role of politicians has been diminished, and I think all of us have, sadly, played a role in that. When you walk out of this universe into the other one out there, it's not always what you expect. Derwyn knew that; he looked out for us. So my fear dissipated and moved to one of tremendous respect and appreciation.

On behalf of the PC caucus I thank Derwyn for what he did in this chamber. Most importantly, we thank him for what he did outside of it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To the member from Niagara West-Glanbrook, I was blessed to be on that committee on the creation of the former parliamentarians. So again I'd say to former parliamentarians: Thank you for being here. It's a testimony to—I'll just move on.

To the family, we offer you, as we always do, a DVD of today's procedures. I thank all members for their very kind and heartfelt thoughts. You will receive a copy of Hansard as well. I want to thank all of you for being here on behalf of the entire House. Thank you very much.

And now the other side of the story: It's now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. This week, the Liberals will table their ninth straight budget with a multi-billion-dollar deficit.

Applause.

Mr. Patrick Brown: The Premier and the finance minister want to applaud that because they have a history of blaming everyone except themselves. They've blamed the federal government; they've blamed a recession that was eight years ago.

The Fraser Institute did a recent study that shows that that history of blaming others is not supported by evidence, and that blaming the federal government—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): However, I'll still keep doing my job.

Please finish.

Mr. Patrick Brown: The Fraser Institute study says that blaming the federal government or blaming a recession from eight years ago is not supported in fact.

Given that recent study, when the Liberals table their budget with another multi-billion dollar deficit and a debt of over \$300 billion, what I want to know is who you're going to blame next?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just be clear with the Leader of the Opposition and the people of Ontario that we are implementing our plan and, at the same time, we are eliminating the deficit. We're doing that in a way that's fair and we're doing it in a way that supports economic growth and the creation of jobs.

We are on track to eliminate our deficit by 2017-18, which is the track that we said we were on. We have stayed on it. We have overachieved in terms of deficit reduction every year and, at the same time, we have made—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It goes both ways. I'm inches away from going into individuals and warnings.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:—investments in people, in their talent, in their skills and in the infrastructure that we know is needed around the province. At the same time, we are eliminating the deficit, and we're on track to do that by 2017-18.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I guess we'll have to wait until tomorrow to find out who they blame next.

My question is for the Premier. Let's talk about the facts: Every person in Ontario has a share of this government's debt. They owe \$21,000 because of the Liberals' mismanagement. As this government's debt grew—and grow it did—the debt-to-GDP ratio has gone from 27.5% when the government took office to 40% today. That is astonishing.

The interest payments on Ontario's debt have become the third-largest ministry in this government. The government is spending 22 times more on interest than what it spends on the Ministry of the Environment.

My question for the Premier is this: Will you apologize to the next generation of Ontario families who are going to have to pay for your decade of waste and incompetence?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm happy to look at the facts. We have taken steps to manage and control our spending growth while at the same time delivering the best possible value for every dollar. Ontario has consistently had the lowest per capita program spending among all Canadian provinces. In fact, 2014-15 marked the sixth year in a row that we reported both lower-than-projected program expenses and a lower deficit. We're doing this in a responsible way. We said that 2017-18 was the year that we would eliminate the deficit, and that is the year that we will eliminate the deficit.

I would remind the member opposite that as soon as he finishes his leadoff questions, his members are going to be standing up asking for more spending. They're going to be asking for increases in spending, which is

entirely inconsistent, not that I would expect consistency from the Leader of the Opposition.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Insults don't hide the truth.

I will be very clear: During your time in office, the debt-to-GDP ratio has gone from 27.5% to 40%. That is your legacy. That is your debt for Ontario.

Now, if it wasn't for Liberal scandal, waste and mismanagement—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Newmarket–Aurora, come to order.

Mr. Patrick Brown:—this government wouldn't have to sell Hydro One.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Associate Minister of Finance, come to order.

Mr. Patrick Brown: They wouldn't have to raise taxes on everything from beer to jet fuel. They wouldn't have to charge tolls for highways that Ontario families have already paid for.

1110

The Financial Accountability Office, an office that you created, says that your numbers are wrong. They said that Ontario is on pace for a \$3.5-billion deficit in 2017-18. All the facts are against what your government is preaching.

Mr. Speaker, as our final budget ask, will the government include in their budget tomorrow a credible plan—not a stretch goal—for a balanced budget and take immediate action to pay down the \$300-billion Liberal debt?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. We are on track to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. If you look at the Conference Board of Canada, Ontario will be one of the growth leaders in 2016. BMO said that Ontario's economy is expected to be among the top performers this year. RBC said, "Ontario is poised to be among the faster-growing provincial economies in 2016." Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. We're implementing that plan. We are on track to eliminate the deficit.

The Leader of the Opposition wants us to increase health care beyond what we are already increasing it. He wants electricity prices to go down, either by a subsidy or—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order and the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry will come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I can only assume that he wants to either subsidize electricity prices or go back to coal—we're not doing that—and he wants the deficit

eliminated. There are inconsistencies in those arguments that are not compatible with responsible governance.

We have a plan. We're implementing that plan. We're on track to eliminate the deficit responsibly and invest in the people of this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Later today, we will debate our opposition day motion related to tomorrow's budget. We've presented three basic requests that we believe the government of Ontario should meet, quite frankly, at a bare minimum.

One of those key asks is that the government put forward a credible plan to balance the budget and pay down our debt. The Auditor General, the Financial Accountability Officer and even the CBC said that there are consequences to perpetual deficits and the \$300-billion debt this government has amassed. We pay nearly \$1 billion a month in interest, which is crowding out key services. We see it every day in our health care cuts.

The Premier has scoffed at our other asks. Will she at least support this one?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, we have a plan. We have a credible plan. The member opposite will see in the budget tomorrow that we are on track. He knows that year after year, we have over-performed on our deficit reduction targets and that we're on track—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, come to order.

I have now decided to move to warnings—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to make sure that those who are talking over top of me hear it again: I'm moving to warnings.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows full well that for six years in a row, we have been eliminating the deficit. We are on target to eliminate it completely by 2017-18.

But I will return to the fact that the three requests that the opposition party is putting forward are inconsistent. You cannot increase health care beyond what we are already doing and lower electricity prices, either through a subsidy or going back to coal, and at the same time speed up the elimination—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: Nobody believes a word that this government says anymore, and is it any wonder why? They claim to have a path to balance, but the confidential gas plants scandal documents we uncovered showed they have a multi-billion dollar hole in that plan. In fact, the Financial Accountability Officer

confirmed what was in those documents in his last report. And the fall economic statement showed, plain as day, that they're using the money from the sale of Hydro One to make the deficit appear smaller.

My question is to the Premier: Will your budget be simply more word games and sleight of hand, or will you present a truly credible plan to balance the books?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Not only does the Financial Accountability Officer recognize in his scenarios that our government's return to balance is achievable, he also acknowledged that the government is on track, when he made his statement, to reach our 2015-16 deficit target of \$8.5 billion. He also acknowledges that we're taking a responsible approach to holding spending growth in order to meet our targets.

We are happy to have the scrutiny of the Financial Accountability Officer. We're happy to have the scrutiny of the opposition party. But I would say to the opposition party and the people of Ontario that we have to have a consistency in the debate. We have to have the opportunity to say, "Well, if you're asking us to do more in terms of health care and increase spending"—because we continue to increase health care spending but you're pushing for increased spending in health care—"if you want electricity prices to go down through a subsidy or returning to coal, we're not going to do that, and we have a plan to eliminate the deficit."

So on all fronts, we have responses today to what the opposition is asking.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: I had hoped the Premier would treat the concerns of families seriously, Speaker, but apparently that's not to be. They're not even concerned with the appearance of consulting with families anymore. They knew full well that the budget was written when all three parties toured the province on pre-budget consultations. They knew that when they sent us out to work.

Last week, the finance minister called our budget a fiscal fantasy. Apparently, it's a fantasy to ask for affordable hydro. Apparently, adequate staffing in our hospitals is now a fantasy. How arrogant, Speaker, how out of touch has this government become?

So my question is, will the Premier stop her double-speak and begin to help Ontario families—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish your question.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are very, very concerned with the needs of the people in this province, which is why, if we want to talk about the electricity sector, we have put programs in place specifically to help people who are struggling to pay their bills get some support. The Ontario Electricity Support Program is for low-income families. That is why it has been put in place, Mr. Speaker.

We understand that we need to continue to invest in health care and increase funding. We have been doing that year over year and we will continue to do that.

But at the same time, we recognize that eliminating the deficit is a part of our fiscal responsibility. That's why we have a plan to do that. The members opposite will see in the budget that we have taken responsible steps on all of those fronts. Given that, I look forward to their support of our budget, Mr. Speaker.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. In the last two budgets, the Premier has made deep cuts to education. Will the education cuts continue in Thursday's budget or will the Premier respect the needs of Ontario students and stop the cuts to education?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just have to say to the leader of the third party that what she has said is just not accurate. In fact, the funding for education has stayed stable, even in the face of fewer students in the system, which means that the per capita expenditure on students has gone up. There is more money per capita for students in the education system now than previously.

The reality is that we understand that having schools that are well-staffed, having school buildings that are in good shape, therefore having capital dollars for school boards to spend on those, is critical, which is why education funding continues to be stable year over year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I don't know what the Premier defines as stable. On Monday, the Premier said, "We're not cutting education funding." But in the 2014 budget, the Liberal government slashed \$400 million out of education. In the 2015 budget, they slashed \$250 million from education. The Premier's own documents say that she's now planning to cut another \$250 million in this year's budget.

Now that's nearly \$1 billion cut in just three years, Speaker, and it means closing more schools and cutting vital supports to students. Will this Premier come clean and tell the people of this province and tell the students of this province if she, in fact, will be cutting another \$250 million or more in Thursday's budget out of the education file?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to answer this question once again. This is actually becoming fairly regular.

To make it perfectly clear, we have not cut the education budget. It is \$22.5 billion transferred to school boards this year; it was \$22.5 billion transferred to school boards the year before. And, as the Premier has already noted, because the number of students has actually declined fairly dramatically, we have more money per pupil. You would be interested to know, Speaker, that over the length of our mandate, the per pupil funding has actually gone up 59%.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier and her minister seem to think that everything is just fine in education. But tell that to the people who have seen their neighbourhood schools close, like the delegation that's here today from Harrow, or parents of the most vulnerable students in our province, who are seeing supports like special education slashed, or students who are freezing cold and have to wear their jackets in their classrooms while they are learning just because the heaters are broken and there's no money to fix them.

The Premier may be in denial about what her cuts mean—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Come to order.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier may be in denial and her minister may be in denial about what their cuts mean, but students and their families and educators see first-hand—first-hand—what's happening, Speaker.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is warned.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: But do you know what, Speaker? The money lost from selling off Hydro One could lead to even deeper cuts in education.

Will Thursday's budget stop the cuts to education? That is the question that this government needs to answer.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to report that when you look at the record over the past several years, you will find that, in fact, the high school graduation rate in Ontario has gone up. When we came into office, the high school graduation rate in Ontario was 68%. The high school graduation rate in Ontario is now 84%. Not only have we increased student achievement; we have already invested over \$13.9 billion in 755 new schools and 700 major additions and retrofits. We'll continue to invest, with another \$11 billion going to new schools, major renovation and school consolidations.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. This Premier might think her health transformation looks good on paper, but for everyday people it is ugly. Nurses are being fired. Home care wait times are months long, even though the Premier committed to the NDP plan for a five-day home care wait time. I guess that was another one of the Premier's stretch goals. Hospitals are closing beds; surgeries are being cancelled. Will this Premier admit that patients are paying the price for her cutbacks in health care and stop the cuts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, again, as in the discussion around education, the leader of the third party is just not accurate. The fact is that the information is not accurate. The fact is that we continue to increase health care spending. We are very acutely aware of the need for

more supports in things like community care and mental health. There is money going into those sectors.

Again, year over year, health care spending increases. So we recognize, as the demographics change in this province—and, again, this is also related to education, because the demographic shift is very real. The population is aging. People want a different kind of health care and a different delivery. They want it in their homes. They want it in the community. Those are the changes that are happening. Change is challenging for people, but it's real, and we continue to increase funding in order to make that change happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Either this Premier is not aware or she has her head in the sand. The fundamentals of health care are pretty basic. It's making sure that the care is there for people when and where they need it.

Instead of strengthening care, people are seeing cuts to the care that they need. Hospital care is facing cuts. People are facing massive home care wait-lists, and finding a long-term-care space for seniors can take years in this province.

Is Thursday's budget going to reverse the cuts and put the focus on improving health care, or is this Premier going to continue cutting and insisting that everything is just fine?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to comment in the next supplementary, but let me just be very, very clear: It is our responsibility, as government, to make sure that we continue to improve the services for the people in this province, that we continue to work to get the outcomes on surgery wait times, on community care access, and to make sure that young people who need mental health supports and seniors who need supports get those supports.

When the leader of the third party proposes that somehow I am satisfied with the status quo, she is absolutely wrong. Everything about our government is about finding ways to improve services for the people of the province, to build up those services, to make sure that hospitals and health science centres and community services are improved. That's why—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Start the clock. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier might be aware of what her responsibility is, but what she isn't aware of is that she is failing in that responsibility miserably for the people of Ontario. There is a serious problem when people across Ontario ask for something really basic, like making sure our health care system provides the care that they need, but what they get is a Liberal government that keeps closing beds, putting hospitals into gridlock, firing nurses and keeping people waiting for home care and for long-term care.

The Premier's job is to work for all Ontarians, but there are more and more people who cannot get the

health care that they need in this province. That is the fact. Will this Premier acknowledge that health care is supposed to be about meeting people's needs and stop any further cuts to health care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, there aren't any cuts to health care. We're continuing to increase, year after year, the budget. We've—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a good thing that I didn't remind the third party that they fired 3,000 nurses or that they delisted home care from OHIP when they were in government.

Let's just take one piece of evidence to demonstrate the improvements that have been made: the almost \$2 billion that we have invested specifically to help reduce wait times for surgeries and diagnostic imaging. As a result of that investment, we have saved Ontarians 282 million total days that they otherwise would have had to wait for these services. We went from the worst wait times in all of Canada, when we inherited government from the Conservatives—we now have the shortest wait times in Canada.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Treasury Board president. Tomorrow, this government will table its ninth consecutive deficit—overachievers, the lot of them—borrowing more money than they take in and paying almost \$1 billion in interest payments that should instead be intended for hospitals and classrooms. The Treasury Board president's mandate letter is very clear. It says, "You will work closely with your fellow cabinet ministers to ensure that our government meets its fiscal targets." Yet she is not.

1130

Both the Auditor General and the Financial Accountability Officer said that this government has no credible plan to balance the budget. In fact, all we saw today was a plan to increase taxes, and that's not sustainable on the people of this province. Can the minister explain to the people of this House why she refuses to follow her mandate letter and why she is willing to compromise the fiscal health of this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know we're all very anxious to see tomorrow's budget. I'm sure everybody will be here and will listen to the news, and we will confirm that we are in fact on track to meet our commitment to balance the budget by 2017-18. We are doing it in a way that is thoughtful, that is disciplined, that is responsible. We are going through every service, every program and every ministry across government, finding ways to deliver services better for people, sometimes at a lower cost. That work is under way. We are on track to balance, and we will all look forward to tomorrow where you will

actually see further details on our plan to achieve balance while protecting the services that people rely on.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, the fact is, the only thing they're on track to do is change our licence plate to "Ontario, Yours to Recover."

Back to the President of the Treasury Board. She has one job: to find savings right across the province—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please finish.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: She has one job: to put the province back to balance. That's not going to happen, according to the Auditor General and the Financial Accountability Office, as well as their own internal documents, as my colleague stated earlier, that we recovered during the gas plant scandal. The only accomplishment, in fact, that she had last year was an across-the-board salary increase in the public sector.

I need to remind the minister that every single dollar that we spend servicing the debt and the deficit is a dollar taken away from a child in a classroom or a patient in a hospital bed. Without a credible plan to return to surplus or balance, financing Ontario's public services will be compromised.

So I ask her again, will the President of the Treasury Board commit to this House for a long-term, realistic, credible plan—not a stretch goal, not an aspirational goal, but a real credible plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: In the first question, we are on track to balance our budget by 2017-18, and tomorrow we'll reveal more details about that.

But I have to say, Speaker, that this is actually a refreshing day in question period, because for the first time the member from Nipissing has a question and the member from Nepean-Carleton has a question about fiscal responsibility. Until today, all we've been hearing is, "Spend more, spend more, spend more. Pay doctors more. Spend more on this, spend more on that."

Today, we are reminded there is still this notion within the Conservative Party that fiscal responsibility is important. We are delivering on the promise to get to balance. We are doing it in a thoughtful, responsible way that protects the services and enhances the services that people—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. We all know that everyone is going to have to do their part to take on climate change. We also know that some are in a stronger position to help than others. In British Columbia, low-income families receive assistance from the government dealing with their carbon tax. In Alberta, the government's proposing to help low-income families with support that will leave them, overall, better off, even with Alberta's new carbon tax. Will the government support a new consumer rebate to ensure that cap-and-trade does not increase inequality in Ontario?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We are very concerned about two things that are tied into our plan. One is that we achieve the maximum level of job creation in the low-carbon economy, because the world is going to be different and the economy's going to be different. We, in our partnership with Quebec and California, will be leading the North American economy, and are in job creation already, before we've made the massive investments in building retrofits, in making modest-income family homes less expensive to live in, making transportation less expensive by our investments in public transit and electric vehicles and that infrastructure. We already have \$325 million out there, including subsidies for social housing and working families. We are already, even before our system is up and operating, investing at a level that almost no other jurisdiction is. We think that we're already really on the pathway to what the member's objectives are.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Sierra Club recently noted that struggling families spend a higher percentage of their household income on home heating and on gasoline than those from wealthier households. These struggling families have less control over their emissions, particularly if they're tenants or if they lack access to transit.

I believe that the vast majority of Ontarians, regardless of income, are ready to do their part to take on climate change, but the burden has to be shared fairly. What support will this government give to struggling families to ensure that cap-and-trade does not increase inequality in Ontario?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The short answer to that question is really an unprecedented investment in two things that cost families money: transportation and managing the cost of their homes. We will be massively investing in those.

We know this will not have any upward pressure on electricity prices. As a matter of fact, we expect a modest reduction in the cost of electricity for families in that area. Working with energy and my colleagues at municipal affairs and housing, we already have demonstration projects out there that are going to help communities get homeowners into technology that costs almost nothing. We have a great nuclear baseload overnight that we can actually use to charge electric vehicles.

This transformation, though, is about something else that working families need: more and better jobs. When we retrofit every building in Ontario over the next two or three decades, that will be an unprecedented job creation initiative for middle- and low-income families—unprecedented because it's easy to afford it when you've got a good income.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Transit is an incredibly important part of life in my community of Davenport. My constitu-

ents want to know that they have access to transit that is both reliable and affordable. While many living in Davenport have expressed how impressed they are with the reliability of the Union Pearson Express, I have been hearing from residents since prior to my election that the UPX should be more accessible for their families.

I have long advocated for greater accessibility to the service on behalf of my community. That is why I was pleased to join the Minister of Transportation and the MPPs for Trinity–Spadina and York South–Weston, as well as representatives from Metrolinx, for an announcement on this topic yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please provide members of this House with more details on what our government is doing to make the Union Pearson Express more affordable for my constituents of Davenport and for all Ontarians?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member from Davenport not only for the question, but for her advocacy relating to this issue and relating to better transit for the people of Davenport.

Since the UP Express first launched in June 2015, it has been offering predictable and reliable service for passengers. Over the last eight months, it's become clear that those who have had the opportunity to use the UP Express love it.

It's equally clear to us that ridership numbers need to increase and more needs to be done to make this happen. That's why I was pleased to join with caucus colleagues to announce yesterday that we will be significantly reducing the UP Express fare. Effective March 9, passengers using a Presto card will be able to travel from Union to Pearson for \$9. The cost for non-Presto-card users will be \$12.

Speaker, these new, lower fares will make taking the UP Express more affordable for middle-class families and commuters, and it will also attract more riders.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from York South–Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like to thank the minister for that answer. Yesterday's announcement was particularly important for those living in York South–Weston, a community that has long advocated for these changes—they were the first to advocate for these changes—and that is made up of people who are looking for fast, frequent and affordable transit service to get downtown.

As part of the announcement, you stated that fares along the UP Express routes will be better aligned with existing GO fares. This means that a commuter taking the UP Express from Weston station can expect to pay \$4.71 for one stop and \$5.02 for two stops to Union Station with a Presto card. The new fare structure is a very exciting announcement.

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The minister also mentioned other measures that will be taken to increase ridership. Can he please give us some details on that?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I also thank the member for York South–Weston for her advocacy on this and many other issues.

As I mentioned earlier, we lowered the UP Express fare because we know that ridership numbers need to increase. But lowering fares is just one of the steps that we are taking to increase ridership. In partnership with Metrolinx, we have identified barriers such as low awareness, ingrained travel habits and impediments to ticket sales, and are strategizing to overcome these barriers.

Marketing campaigns, better way-finding signage and incentive programs are examples of some of the strategies that are being developed and will be deployed to ensure that we improve ridership. I am confident that these steps, in addition to the significantly reduced fares announced yesterday, will lead to further growth in ridership. I strongly encourage all travellers and commuters in the region, those visiting the region and members of both opposition parties, to join with us and try the Union Pearson Express because we know that once you do, you will love it.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Premier. This government has failed to balance the books nine straight times. Along the way, they've piled up nearly \$300 billion in debt and driven our debt-to-GDP ratio from 27% to over 40% today. That's a 48% increase in just nine years. Interest payments alone account for \$11.4 billion each and every year, money that could and should be going to pay for new investments and key programs.

Premier, instead of reduced funding for doctors, school closures and increased hydro rates, Ontario taxpayers deserve a credible plan to balance the budget, including immediate action to pay down Ontario's massive \$300-billion debt. When the Premier's budget is presented tomorrow, will she finally stand with Ontario taxpayers and have a plan to pay down Ontario's debt?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That plan is in place, and it is a responsible plan. What the member opposite is doing is including in one question, "eliminate the deficit," which we have a plan to do; we're on track to do that, and at the same time he's saying, "Increase spending"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The to-and-fro is not helpful for me to stay focused, and I wish that it would stop from both sides.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: He's saying, "Even though you"—government—"are increasing funding in health care year over year, pay doctors more." Doctors who are the highest paid in the country: Pay them more. Pay more into the health care system, beyond the increases that we're making. At the same time, he is inconsistently saying, "Move faster on eliminating the deficit."

We have a plan in place. We are on track to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. But we are investing in Ontario's growth. We are investing in the economic growth that's creating jobs today and is creating economic prosperity into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: In less than 10 years, Ontario's debt has grown by 91%, the highest rate of growth of any provincial government. Shamefully, taxpayers are now shelling out almost \$1 million a month in interest payments alone.

Later today, Premier, I'll introduce a private member's bill to cap Ontario's debt. My bill would install a provincial debt ceiling as a means to help limit and curb your reckless spending addiction.

The Financial Accountability Officer has already stated that if your revenue and spending continue as they have, you will run deficits both this year and next year.

So I'm asking the Premier again: When will you present a credible plan to balance the budget, including immediate action to pay down Ontario's debt?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We'll be presenting that plan tomorrow because that is the plan that has been in place. We are on track to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18.

The reckless proposal that the member opposite is putting forward would lead to an inability of government to meet the needs of the people in this province.

Let me talk about the things that we have been investing in: the largest infrastructure investment in our history—\$134 billion over 10 years. What that does is it creates 110,000 jobs a year and it meets the needs of communities to have upgraded infrastructure. We're ensuring that all Ontarians have access to a secure retirement. We're protecting the environment through our coal plant closures and the new cap-and-trade program. We are moving ahead to make sure that more refugees can settle in Ontario.

All of those things are part of the economy of this province. The economy is more than a balance sheet; it is the environment that we live in and it is the services that we provide now for people and into the future for our children and our grandchildren. That's the plan that we're implementing, Mr. Speaker.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. We now know that the budget was written before Ontarians were actually given a chance to tell the government their priorities. It's too bad, because this government might have learned something.

The mayor of London told the finance committee that transit use in London has nearly doubled since 1998 and continues to grow. That's why the city council unanimously agreed last November to support a \$1.1-billion investment in rapid transit.

Mayor Brown asked for a one-third contribution from the provincial government. Will this week's budget

include funding for this important rapid transit project in London?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm actually quite happy to report that I had an opportunity to meet with the mayor and other members of London city council just this past Sunday at the OGRA/ROMA conference. We had a wonderful conversation, like we have in the past, about this very topic, Speaker.

What I explained to them was that we look forward to receiving their detailed business case. I understand that the municipality is planning to provide that to us in the next few weeks. We will take that business case. We will do the same analysis for that business case that we do with any of the other transit business cases that we receive, and we'll continue to engage in dialogue with the municipality to move forward with progress for London as it relates to their infrastructure, as we do with all 444 municipalities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I also met with the London delegation at the OGRA/ROMA conference, and they continually mentioned that they didn't get an answer back from this government.

The government has pledged \$15 billion towards transportation infrastructure outside the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, but hardly any of this money has started flowing. In fact, for people living outside the GTHA, last year's budget mainly announced plans to defer transportation infrastructure to future years.

London is the largest city in Canada without a rapid transit system. London is ready to put its money on the table, but the city needs a provincial funding partner. Will this week's budget include a commitment to fund London's rapid transit program, beginning next year?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate the follow-up question. I'm pretty sure the member opposite, being responsible, wouldn't want us to approve funding for a project until we receive and analyze the business case.

I'm not sure what lack of an answer the city of London could have suggested they had. I was very clear. It was a very cordial meeting. We have a great relationship, of course, with London, Speaker.

But I think this speaks to a larger issue, which is the very ambitious plan that our Premier and our government have to build Ontario up, including communities like London. It is precisely because of the leadership of this Premier and our London MPP, the deputy Premier and President of the Treasury Board—who has consistently stood up for her community—that we are making progress and that we are moving the province forward. Because of their leadership, we'll continue to partner with London to make sure that, once we get the business case, we get it right.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Harinder Malhi: My question is to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. My riding is home to several payday lenders, an increasingly popular

business model that offers short-term, high-interest loans. I understand the demand for this type of business model is increasing and many Ontarians do not have the option to borrow money from banks or their families. However, I'm also concerned for Ontarians who find themselves in debt cycles by relying on these services too regularly.

My constituents want a regulatory framework that ensures they have access to the services they need without being subject to harmful practices. I know that our government took an important step by passing the Payday Loans Act in 2008, after the federal government down-loaded responsibility to the province.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please inform the House how his ministry is addressing these concerns and what protections Ontarians can count on from our government?

Hon. David Orazietti: I want to thank the member from Brampton–Springdale for the question and for her strong advocacy on behalf of her constituents.

I certainly understand the member's question with regard to payday loans and can assure all the members of the House that we continue to make progress on protecting vulnerable consumers.

The Payday Loans Act guarantees that all loan agreements are presented in writing, caps the total cost of borrowing and ensures that payday lenders cannot roll one loan into another. When certain licensees tried to evade these rules, we took appropriate enforcement action.

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We also understand, Speaker, that with new technology and continuing evolving business practices in this sector, it's important for our government to improve legislation. That's why we consulted in municipalities across Ontario and enlisted the advice of an expert panel to review the regulations. We are moving forward with Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, which was introduced in December.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Thank you to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services for the steps that his ministry has taken to protect vulnerable consumers in Ontario.

Like many Ontarians, I am pleased to see the minister introduce new legislation to protect consumers who use alternative financial services. I understand that this legislation is based on panel recommendations and that the minister had asked the panel to expand its report to address services beyond payday loans. With an increased prominence of instalment loans, rent-to-own agreements, cheque cashing services and debt collection services in Ontario, it's important for new legislation to protect consumers who are using a range of alternative financial services.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please update the House on his recently introduced legislation and the enhanced regulations it will create, if passed?

Hon. David Orazietti: Again, I want to thank the member from Brampton–Springdale for the supplement-

ary. As the member noted, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act was informed by expert panel recommendations and extensive consultations with consumers and community agencies right across Ontario. If passed, the legislation will help protect vulnerable consumers by improving debt collection rules. It will help by capping the rate of cheque cashing. It will also limit repayment on rent-to-own agreements and limit optional insurance costs for added instalment loans, as well as adding a seven-day waiting period between payday loans.

Speaker, I'll continue working with local stakeholders and community leaders to ensure that we develop strong regulations to protect consumers in Ontario. This important work, in addition to our government's outreach to credit unions and banks as safe alternatives to payday lenders, will play an important role in protecting and educating consumers across Ontario.

I encourage all members of the Legislature to support Bill 156.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. For Ontario's film and television industry, last year's budget was a horror flick. Cuts to the production services tax credit and the computer animation and special effects tax credit jeopardized future investment in a \$1.29-billion industry that supports 31,000 jobs. Estimates put the annual lost revenue from foreign productions at over \$60 million.

I'm proud of our critic Laurie Scott, who was able to amend last year's budget and delay those cuts, saving jobs and investment by keeping productions here. But the minister should know the uncertainty is hurting Ontario's ability to attract new productions and grow the industry.

Speaker, will the minister provide the stability Ontario's film industry needs by confirming that tomorrow's budget won't slash these credits again?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to start by saying how proud we are of the cultural sector here in the province of Ontario. It's a \$22-billion sector and we're extremely proud of it.

We put those tax incentives in place so we could help grow the industry. We have our interactive digital tax credits—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The warning is still on, just to remind you.

Carry on.

Hon. Michael Coteau: We have our interactive digital tax credits. We have our music fund, which BC has just incorporated into their program, and we do have film and television tax credits. We saw a continued growth this year, up about 5% from the previous year, in accessing those tax credits, so we are investing more money.

Mr. Speaker, we should be very proud of our film and television tax credit and our cultural sector here in the

province of Ontario. I hope the member opposite will join us in saying how successful it is here in the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: My supplementary is back to the minister.

The minister has memorized his lines, but I think he needs a better script. He can't have this uncertainty year after year. There is just too much competition.

Last week's BC budget reaffirmed support for film tax credits and committed the government to working with the industry. That kind of support and the stability it creates gets the attention from producers.

Meanwhile, questions about the tax credits' future in Ontario is the number one obstacle to recruiting new productions. There won't be any more "Action" if we think the government will yell "Cut." Only a multi-year agreement provides the stability to grow our creative economy. Speaker, will the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I find it hard to understand that the first time I announced that the warning was still on, it happens again. So I'm going to remind this side. Please.

Please finish and wrap up.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is very simple: Will the minister form a working group with the industry to strike this agreement and make Ontario the premier destination for film and TV production outside of LA?

Hon. Michael Coteau: As the member knows, we're doing a cultural strategy right across the province of Ontario. We have an advisory committee, to me and to this government, to talk about ways to really leverage culture further.

Let's talk about music, for example. Last year, there was a Billboard top 10 where six Ontarians occupied the top 10 spots at the same time: Drake, Magic!, Shawn Mendes, Justin Bieber—this is the first time in the history of Ontario.

We are so proud of our cultural sector here in the province of Ontario. Instead of pulling them down and saying that we're not doing enough, he should be standing up and saying that this government is supporting the film and television tax credit and the cultural sector beyond any government before us.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Health. Every day, the minister gets up and tries to deny that Liberals are cutting patient care. But patients and nurses in Windsor know what's really happening: The Liberals have frozen hospital budgets for four straight years, and that's forcing Windsor Regional Hospital to cut 169 registered nurses, more than 10% of its RN workforce. Now, American hospitals like Beaumont Health

System in Michigan have come to Windsor to hire nurses who have been cut from our hospitals. RNs are being interviewed one day and hired the very next. These nurses should be working in Ontario's hospitals, not being forced by this government's cuts to leave the country just to find work.

Can the minister tell us how many nurses who have been cut from our hospitals by this government have been hired by American hospitals that are only too thrilled to take our highly skilled and dedicated Ontario nurses?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. It gives me the opportunity to talk about Windsor Regional and helping, I think, the public understand—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I guess reminding people of warnings is not good enough, so the member from Kitchener–Waterloo is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: So in the first instance, we did provide Windsor Regional Hospital with \$7 million in additional funding this year to help them address their budget pressures.

But the important thing, I think, to understand is that Windsor Regional Hospital is one of only a handful, only a few hospitals around the province that never made a transition to look at its nursing services from a holistic, comprehensive perspective; to understand that there is a role for RPNs, registered practical nurses, in our hospitals, for example; that there is a role for nurse practitioners; that there is a role for RNs. In fact, Windsor Regional Hospital is one of the only hospitals in the province that has up to date a 100% RN nursing workforce. They're working to change that mix so that it's most appropriate for the patients.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Minister of Health. The Liberals' cuts to hospitals are devastating for patients and nurses in southwestern Ontario. There were 169 registered nurses cut in Windsor and even more front-line health care workers cut in Sarnia, Hamilton, Waterloo, London, St. Thomas—the list goes on.

Those cuts mean longer wait times for patients, more worry and stress for loved ones, and they leave our nurses feeling discouraged and frustrated by a government that just doesn't share the priorities of Ontarians. When nurses are laid off, families can't just pick up and move across the province to find a part-time casual nursing job somewhere else. Instead, these nurses in our border communities are forced to look to the private health care system in the US for jobs they can't get here at home.

When will the Liberals stop cutting our hospitals, stop pushing Ontario's nurses to take jobs in Michigan and start protecting patient care in all of our communities?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I did mention that an additional \$7 million was applied and was provided to Windsor Regional Hospital last year. In fact, our funding in the last decade to that specific hospital has increased by

approximately 50%. So the funding does increase, and it doesn't include other substantial funding: the \$1.9 billion I referenced earlier this morning for decreasing wait times, some of that funding distributed to Windsor Regional as well.

But I think we should leave it to the experts, to the LHIN and the local leadership, as well, to make sure that the mix of nursing and other staff in the hospital truly meets the patient needs. It needs to be a patient-centred system. Windsor Regional is one, as I mentioned, of just a few hospitals around the province that haven't yet made that transition to recognizing and, quite frankly, respecting the role of our registered practical nurses in this province and understanding that they do have a role to play at our hospitals. Those are the changes they're trying to make.

1200

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, our government has made a clear commitment to learn from the past, build on our success stories and increase our efforts to help aboriginal learners get the education and training they need. That is why it is imperative that we continue to collaborate with our aboriginal partners to support the programs and services that are responsive to the diverse needs of aboriginal learners across our province.

I understand that your ministry has made significant progress on this front since launching Ontario's Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework. Many constituents in my riding of Burlington, and indeed all Ontarians, are interested in knowing what our government is doing to increase aboriginal access to post-secondary education and skills training programs. Minister, can you please inform the members of this House on how your ministry is supporting aboriginal learners in Ontario by providing equal access to high-quality post-secondary education and skills training programs?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I would like to thank the member from Burlington for that question. I want to begin by saying, "Meegwetich." Our government is committed to providing high-quality post-secondary education and skills training for aboriginal people in Ontario. Last year we invested more than \$30 million in the Postsecondary Education Fund for Aboriginal Learners and an additional \$5 million to ensure that post-secondary education and training remains accessible at Ontario's nine aboriginal institutions.

Furthermore, through Ontario's aboriginal skills advancement program, we are collaborating with our aboriginal partners to support up to 100 post-secondary and training programs and investing \$3 million annually between 2015 and 2018 in the aboriginal skills advancement program in the Ring of Fire area. Later this year, my ministry will release a report to highlight what our

government is doing to improve quality and culturally relevant post-secondary and training opportunities for aboriginal communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. It is reassuring to know that our government is committed to providing high-quality post-secondary education and skills training to aboriginal Ontarians. Minister, partnerships are at the core of our government's efforts to increase access to opportunities for aboriginal people in this province. Investing in the talent and skills of First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners is one of the many steps of Ontario's journey of healing and reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

It is also important in terms of our economic development and our prosperity as a province. I understand that you recently visited Six Nations Polytechnic to make a historic announcement about aboriginal post-secondary education in Ontario. Minister, can you please tell us more about what you announced and how it supports our government's commitment to promote aboriginal post-secondary education in Ontario?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member for that question. Our government strongly believes that the First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners deserve equal access to high-quality post-secondary education and skills training programs.

Just recently, I visited Six Nations Polytechnic with my colleague Minister Zimmer and yourself, Mr. Speaker, to announce that, for the first time in the history of this province, Six Nations Polytechnic would be able to offer a stand-alone bachelor of arts degree in Ojibwe languages, starting this year. I am proud to say that this stand-alone degree supports the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call for post-secondary institutions to create degree programs in aboriginal and indigenous languages. This is the first step in a plan to offer a four-year bachelor of arts degree in Ojibwe languages.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Randy Hillier: To the Premier: Last week, I questioned this government's commitment to protect women and their families from domestic violence, after two tragic events in my riding left four people dead and another severely injured, and another attempted murder in Bancroft. These events, along with the deaths of three women in Renfrew county last fall, should not be seen just as red flags but, indeed, as a crisis and this government's inability to protect women and their families from domestic violence. Speaker, there is a crisis in rural Ontario. When will the Premier provide more than just lipservice to women and families living in fear in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the minister responsible for women's issues will want to comment on the supplementary.

I will just say that it is in our very DNA as a government to make sure that we put in place protections for vulnerable people. The sexual assault and violence policy that we brought out, *It's Never Okay*, speaks to that. It speaks to our recognition that deep-seated misogyny in our culture demands that we take action. It demands that we change public awareness, that we put in place supports for victims of violence and that we improve the judicial system so that people will come forward.

I would suggest that the work that we're doing—I appreciate the work of the select committee. We are putting in supports around the issue of human trafficking. These are very important issues that we raised and we are acting on.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the Premier: Last week, the response was that the rural realities program was the solution, \$1 million of funding over two years for rural realities. The reality is that in rural Ontario, \$1 million is a pittance without an ounce of protection or prevention for these women and their families, and it is certainly no cure. My colleagues from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and others have offered solutions, but all the Premier's office provides are platitudes and a pittance in return.

When will this Premier wake up and fix this government's failings in our courts, in our corrections, in our probation, in our parole and in law enforcement? These failings are adding up to one thing for sure: Many families in rural Ontario are living in fear, and you're doing nothing about it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: A model of restraint, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to say to the member opposite that, had he been paying attention yesterday, he would have seen that we actually put \$100 million into resources for tracking down and dealing with issues around missing and murdered indigenous women.

I am very pleased that the member opposite has had yet another epiphany. I am very pleased that he is supportive of the initiatives that we have put in place and that he recognizes that there is more to be done.

But I will not—I will not—take lessons from this member on how to invest in and how to support the women of this province. The policies that we have put in place are groundbreaking. They are policies that are being copied by other provinces across the country. There is more to be done. This is a decades-old issue. We're taking action. I look forward to his support as we move forward.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Did the Premier mean to say, "Especially this member?"

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated. That's not appropriate.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry, in all of the introductions, I neglected to introduce Ingrid, who is here. Ingrid is the owner of the Swiss-Master Chocolatier in my riding at York Mills and Bayview. It is awesome chocolate and I encourage everyone to drop in.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1210 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: I had the opportunity to introduce them this morning, but they've come back this afternoon: representatives of the Canadian Men's Health Foundation. Welcome once again. We're going to introduce a bill a little later on and I'm glad you're here for it.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DAVID MACKAY

Mr. Todd Smith: Earlier this month, the city of Belleville lost one of its greatest citizens, one of its most beloved businessmen, and I lost a good friend. David Mackay was described in the media as a man that people turned to when they needed help. Everything that we think about when we think about small business people, from personal service to active community support and philanthropy, was central to the David Mackay that I knew.

David got into the insurance business in 1965 in Sawyerville, Quebec. He founded Mackay Insurance Brokers in 1977 out of his basement with just 25 clients. Today, Mackay Insurance has more than 5,000 clients and 12 full-time staff: a true small business success story in Quinte.

To this day, you'll see Mackay Insurance sponsoring local minor sports teams; you'll see them participating in major community events. The people who worked for David Mackay proudly tell you about the impact that he had on their lives.

In his personal profile, David Mackay listed his family, his southern gospel music and the Belleville Bulls as the things he enjoyed most, and that's where I got to

know him. Over the more than 15 years I helped to call Bulls games, I talked to David Mackay countless times about our beloved Bullies. He was always free with a friendly opinion about Kevin Lalande's rebounds, P. K. Subban's slapshot, or which side of the power play Jonathan Cheechoo should be on.

Last year, I had the great honour to present David with a scroll commemorating his 50th year in the insurance business.

Belleville lost an outstanding businessman, a tremendous citizen and a good friend when David Mackay died. To his kids, Bruce, Paul and Carol, and his grandchildren, know that David left his community a far better place than he found it and we're all grateful to him.

HOWARD PAWLEY

Mr. Percy Hatfield: At the end of my statement, I will be asking for unanimous consent for a moment of silence to honour a great Canadian.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I appreciate that from the member but, with his indulgence, I'll wait until all the statements are done and then come back to it.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker.

Howard Pawley was born in Brampton, Ontario. He moved to Manitoba when he was 17. Howard joined the NDP and was elected in the riding of Selkirk in 1969. As I recall, he spent most of that campaign laid up in the hospital with a bad back after a rear-end car accident.

Premier Ed Schreyer—who, by the way, was the first cousin of Adele Pawley—named him to his cabinet. Howard was the minister who introduced a public auto insurance bill to Manitoba. He became leader of the party in 1979 and was elected Premier in 1981, replacing Sterling Lyon—and, by coincidence, Sterling Lyon was born in Windsor, Ontario.

During his first term, Howard Pawley ensconced French language rights into law, and he had to defend it all the way to the Supreme Court. He continued as a political warrior in his second term amid the national battles over the Meech Lake accord and the free trade act with the United States. He always fought for social justice and made sure that workers were paid fairly, regardless of gender, and he enshrined protection for sexual orientation in Manitoba's Human Rights Code.

Howard Pawley stepped down as Premier in 1988 and moved back to Ontario to teach at the University of Windsor in 1991. He was a man of outstanding moral fibre. He was kind and compassionate and made an outstanding contribution to our political science faculty. He retired in 2000 but he kept active, teaching when called upon at the university, and was active in many areas of social justice in our region.

Howard Pawley was truly a man of the people, full of endless optimism. He had blue eyes that just sparkled and the warmest smile you'd ever see. He helped our city restore order when controversy erupted at our public library board, and I was delighted as a city councillor to join Howard on that committee.

I was out of town when Howard passed during our winter break, but I want to say to Adele and the family, thank you for allowing Howard to spend so much of his time serving our community.

As a final note, when he was the Premier of Manitoba, he liked to remind us all that Canada had two serving Premiers from Brampton because Bill Davis was the Premier of Ontario at the same time.

632 PHOENIX ROYAL CANADIAN AIR CADET SQUADRON

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Last Friday, I had the pleasure to attend the mess dinner of the 632 Phoenix Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron in celebration of their 25th anniversary.

More than 160 cadets are part of this squadron based in Orléans. These young Canadians, aged 12 to 18, participate in a variety of fun, challenging and rewarding activities. They learn valuable life skills and work skills, such as teamwork, leadership and citizenship.

I would like to congratulate their commanding officer, Major Jonathan McAuley, for his commitment and dedication to these exceptional young men and women.

It was enlightening to speak to some individuals who, at such a young age, already show leadership and speaking attributes. I was especially touched by a young woman by the name of Ashtyn Ribble. She is a cadet representative of her squadron in the effective speaking program. Her speech topic was about the 100-year anniversary of women's right to vote in our country, and I found out on Monday that she won regional and will be moving on to provincials in April.

All this is to say that we do have a bright future with our youth in Ontario, and I thought it important to specify this today as we show our commitment to eliminating bullying.

HALTON REGION

Mr. Ted Arnott: Last Friday morning, I joined the member for Burlington and the member for Halton at Halton regional headquarters in Oakville. We met at the invitation of regional chair Gary Carr. Also in attendance were senior staff of the region and the mayors of Halton, including Mayor Rick Bonnette. I wish to inform the House of some of the ideas and suggestions that were raised at the meeting.

Halton's response to the Patients First discussion paper must be carefully reviewed and considered by the Minister of Health before decisions on accountability and funding relationships between public health and the LHINs are made. The province needs to fulfill its commitment to cost-shared and 100% funded programs. We need changes to address ambulance offload delays and the implementation of the transfer of governance for the CCAC to Halton region.

We need to see that provincial funding assistance is available for Halton's public housing plans. We need

support for Halton's \$3.7-billion capital infrastructure plan.

We need the province to be a supportive partner in Halton's climate change mitigation programs.

We need provincial approval and investment in a new Wilfrid Laurier University campus in Milton, and we need recognition and understanding of the significant impacts the proposed CN logistics hub may leave on Halton.

Let us work together to make progress on these issues to ensure that the region of Halton continues to be a great place to live, work, raise a family and retire.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Michael Mantha: Today I want to take the opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of organ and tissue donation.

I also want to tell you about a friend and colleague of mine who just lost his 22-year-old son, Adam Prashaw. Adam was a brave and courageous young man diagnosed with epilepsy at a young age. He, like many of our children, didn't let that slow him down. He was fierce, stubborn and independent.

Despite two courageous brain surgeries, the epilepsy took Adam in the end. Adam drowned in a hot tub on Friday, January 22. Adam's family, his parents, siblings and his community of friends are still grieving this enormous loss.

However, on Family Day last week, they received a letter from the Gift of Life Trillium Network confirming that the organs of Adam had saved four people in terminal stages of heart, liver and kidney failure. Everyone who knew Adam knew of his generous and caring spirit. This was so typical of Adam, that, even in his death, he was giving to others. Nothing can diminish the loss of your loved ones, but many families are comforted knowing they have given this life to others.

1510

This is a gift that we all can give, and a gift that, hopefully, our loved ones can receive. Currently, there are over 1,500 people in this province waiting to receive life-saving organ transplants. Thousands more are waiting for life-enhancing tissue transplants.

I want to send my deepest condolences to Adam's loved ones. You must be so proud of him and his gift of life.

I encourage everyone here in this room to visit the website www.beadonor.ca and fill out your donor registration and consent form. You could give a gift of life.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PINK

Mr. Han Dong: I'm pleased to stand in the House today to recognize Pink Shirt Day. As we all know, a safe, inclusive, accepting school environment is essential for students to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

That is why, today, thousands of students and educators across Ontario and throughout the country will be recognizing Pink Shirt Day.

I'm proud to say that many schools in my riding of Trinity-Spadina will be embracing Pink Shirt Day and its message of bullying prevention and awareness. I want to take this opportunity to say to my daughter Emma and my son Matthew, who are studying at Lord Lansdowne Public School, I'm proud of you for the respect you show to your fellow students and your teachers.

Mr. Speaker, this important cause furthers student acceptance and demonstrates leadership in the community. We know that bullying and intimidation has an immediate impact on the well-being of our children and our youth and their ability to succeed in school. That is why Pink Shirt Day is so important.

I want to thank every member of this House today for their recognition of and participation in Pink Shirt Day, and continue to promote the success and the well-being of all our students.

TEAM 1305

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Students in my riding are again gearing up to challenge the world in the field of robotics. Team 1305, the Near North Student Robotics Initiative, will be launching their robot this week in advance of the North Bay regional competition being held at Nipissing University later in March. Some 33 teams, including two from China and one from New York state, along with others from Ontario and Quebec, will be locking their mechanical horns to see whose creation is superior.

This year's theme is FIRST Stronghold. Last year, Team 1305, or Ice Cubed, as they're also known, qualified for the world championship in St. Louis after capturing the Chairman's Award. This is the 16th year for the Near North Student Robotics Initiative, and it wouldn't be possible without the volunteer mentoring efforts of people in our community like Anthony Koziol and Bev Carmichael, both of whom were recognized with awards at last year's regional event in North Bay.

I'm looking forward to attending 1305's launch on Friday and witnessing the ingenuity and innovative skills our students in Nipissing have to offer. They have also been huge mentors to our First Nations community in my riding and have encouraged them as well to enter teams in the last couple of years. It has been very exciting.

I hope members of this House will take the time to get out and support their local robotics team in the weeks ahead.

ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I am pleased to rise today to highlight two programs in my riding of Scarborough Southwest that recently received funding through the Ontario Trillium Foundation grant program. The Warden Woods Community Centre and Mural Routes have helped residents in my riding stay healthy, active and

engaged in their community for many years. This new funding will help them to continue and expand on their significant contributions.

Mural Routes is receiving a grant of \$565,100 over 35 months to help fund the Mural Art Learning Institute, known as MURALI, and to improve upon its continuum of mural-making teaching programs. Warden Woods Community Centre is receiving a grant of \$314,200 over 35 months to grow Active Boost, a program that promotes physical activity and healthy eating. Together, these programs will positively impact the lives of thousands of residents in Scarborough Southwest and beyond Scarborough Southwest.

In the coming weeks, I'll be visiting both Mural Routes and Warden Woods to celebrate the new funding and to get a first-hand look at the incredible work that they're doing in the Scarborough Southwest community.

These are two very deserving programs, Mr. Speaker. I'm thrilled to see them receive this vital support and I very much look forward to seeing them continue to improve the lives of people in the riding of Scarborough Southwest and beyond.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Grant Crack: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to acknowledge another successful Ontario Good Roads Association and Rural Ontario Municipal Association combined conference down at the Royal York hotel.

Over the past three days, I was proud to welcome nine mayors, two wardens and many councillors from my great riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell who made the trip to Toronto again in 2016 to this important annual event.

As a former mayor myself, Speaker, I know that this yearly conference is an excellent occasion for representatives from rural Ontario to highlight the issues and discuss policy to strengthen their communities and also the province.

Over the course of these days, ministers, parliamentary assistants like Marie-France Lalonde from Ottawa–Orléans and members were able to hear about local investment and growth opportunities and priorities throughout my great riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Ministers met with delegations from the town of Hawkesbury, East Hawkesbury, the village of Casselman, Nation municipality, the township of Russell, the township of North Glengarry, the city of Clarence-Rockland, the township of Alfred and Plantagenet, Champlain township, the united counties of Prescott and Russell, the united counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, and the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus and the mayors' committee.

It's always an honour to have Ontario's Premier attend this important conference. Premier Wynne reaffirmed our commitment to providing Ontario's small and rural municipalities with expanded access to predictable, stable

funding in building and repairing our roads, our bridges, our water and waste water infrastructure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Mr. Grant Crack: I'm proud of this government's dedication and commitment to our municipal—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. A gentle reminder that when I stand, you sit.

With the indulgence of the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, he's seeking unanimous consent to use a moment of silence for the passing of his constituent. Do we agree? Agreed. Please stand, everybody, for a moment of silence in tribute to Howard Pawley.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pray be seated.

I am going to take an opportunity here to do a little housekeeping, so I wish that members and staff pay close attention to these two issues. Inside of these two issues it's sensitive, and I appreciate your indulgence and your patience with what I want to remind you of.

USE OF MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Number one, in the statements from members, it's evolved beyond what people would normally do, and that is to brag about their riding. That's the intent. I have been gracious, I think, in terms of when people approach me and say that they want to talk about someone special, they want to do an honour of an individual who either achieved something wonderful that is apolitical or a tribute to them in depth. I have been patient and allowed over the 1:30.

However, I've also indicated to the members—and I'll repeat myself—if there is a bragging about a government issue or if there is a condemnation of a government issue, it better be done inside the 1:30, or I'll cut you off. I may have to force myself to simply say 1:30 and that's it. I'd prefer not to. I'd prefer to provide you with the time that's necessary, as long as it's not too long, to pay tribute to someone who needs a little bit more than 1:30 to do. So I'm asking for your indulgence.

USE OF TRIBUTES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The second point is even more sensitive. There is actually a protocol and a convention that House leaders have agreed upon when we do moments of silence and when we lower the flags and all those kinds of things. I would ask that all members make sure their House leaders are informed of those tributes prior to, to arrange an agreement that they're going to have that happen.

1520

Regrettably, people die all the time. We could be standing doing tributes to everybody. We do have a protocol that's already agreed upon, so I'm going to be sensitive to this, but I'm asking that you try to fulfill that. I would appreciate your participation in helping us achieve that. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener–Waterloo on a point of order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just wanted to quickly introduce Thomas Dang. Thomas Dang is the youngest member of Parliament ever elected in the province of Alberta. He represents the riding of Edmonton–South West. Welcome to Queen's Park, Thomas.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Your committee begs to report the following bills, without amendment:

Bill Pr32, An Act respecting the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario.

Bill Pr33, An Act to revive Stephanie Holdings Ltd.

Bill Pr35, An Act to revive 1709542 Ontario Corporation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Carried.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CAPPING ONTARIO'S DEBT ACT, 2016
LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PLAFONNEMENT
DE LA DETTE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. McNaughton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 168, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act / Projet de loi 168, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration financière.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: The Capping Ontario's Debt Act, 2016: The Financial Administration Act is amended to provide that the crown is not authorized to raise money by way of loan or to receive money through the issue and sale of securities if the effect of doing so would cause Ontario's net debt to exceed 45% of its gross domestic product.

TRANS DAY OF REMEMBRANCE
ACT, 2016LOI DE 2016 SUR LA JOURNÉE
DU SOUVENIR TRANS

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 169, An Act to proclaim the Trans Day of Remembrance / Projet de loi 169, Loi proclamant la Journée du souvenir trans.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The bill proclaims November 20 in each year as the Trans Day of Remembrance. The bill requires members of the Legislative Assembly to observe a moment of silence in honour of trans folk who have died as a result of anti-trans violence.

MEN'S HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK
ACT, 2016LOI DE 2016 SUR LA SEMAINE
DE LA SENSIBILISATION À LA SANTÉ
DES HOMMES

Mr. Potts moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 170, An Act to proclaim the week immediately preceding the third Sunday in June as Men's Health Awareness Week / Projet de loi 170, Loi proclamant la semaine précédant le troisième dimanche de juin Semaine de la sensibilisation à la santé des hommes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Arthur Potts: This bill, if passed, will proclaim the week immediately preceding Father's Day as Men's Health Awareness Week. By doing so, the province will be recognizing the importance of attaining and maintaining positive health outcomes for men across the province for the betterment of communities, families and all Ontarians.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT
ACT (WASTE COLLECTION VEHICLES
AND SNOW PLOWS), 2016LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LE CODE
DE LA ROUTE (VÉHICULES DE COLLECTE
DES DÉCHETS ET CHASSE-NEIGE)

Mr. Harris moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to waste collection vehicles and snow plows / Projet de loi 171, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne les véhicules de collecte des déchets et les chasse-neige.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Michael Harris: Today, I introduce the Highway Traffic Amendment Act with respect to waste collection vehicles and snow plows, 2016, to extend the restrictions on approaching stopped emergency vehicles or tow trucks to approaching a stopped road service vehicle. It also extends those restrictions to vehicles in the course of collecting garbage or material for disposal or recycling from the side of a highway, and road service vehicles that are used to plow, salt or de-ice a highway.

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND LOW-CARBON ECONOMY ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR L'ATTÉNUATION DU CHANGEMENT CLIMATIQUE ET UNE ÉCONOMIE SOBRE EN CARBONE

Mr. Murray moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 172, An Act respecting greenhouse gas / Projet de loi 172, Loi concernant les gaz à effet de serre.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister for a short statement.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I am pleased to rise to introduce the proposed Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act. The legislation, if passed, will move forward with many important initiatives related to introducing a cap-and-trade program in this province and effectively combatting climate change.

Targets are established for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and the Ontario government is required to prepare a climate change action plan, setting out actions that will enable Ontario to achieve those targets; the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change is required to prepare periodic progress reports with respect to the action plan; a framework for Ontario's cap-and-trade program is established; and the minister is authorized to enter into agreements with others for the harmonization and integration of the cap-and-trade program under this act and similar programs.

In concluding, Mr. Speaker, would you allow me to thank several folks in the gallery: Myra Hewitt and Laura Nemchin, legal counsel branch; Alex Wood, executive director; David Harth, senior policy adviser, who has provided such excellent leadership; and two colleagues in my office, Iain Myrans and Kajanath Thiru, who have been working incredibly hard on this.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That was much better. I'm asking all people to come toward the statements inside the explanatory notes, and it sounded like that was the case. Nothing else should be done, because

the rest of it is left for debates, whether it's introductions or comments about the value or lack of value of those bills.

Thank you for being co-operative on that. Again, it's one more thing to keep in your back pocket to remember how we make this place work.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Michael Coteau: On this important month and day, I'd like to start by acknowledging that we're on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit.

I rise today in the Legislature to acknowledge and celebrate that February is Black History Month. As you know, earlier this year, on January 25, our government officially proclaimed February 2016 as Black History Month in Ontario through the Lieutenant Governor's proclamation. This proclamation recognizes the vital role that the black community has played within the social and cultural mosaic of this province.

1530

Just last week, our government formally introduced a bill to establish February as Black History Month in Ontario on an annual basis. I'm proud of our government's leadership on this bill, and I'm also proud that it received support from all members in this Legislature. Thank you. This was truly a great occasion that transcended party lines, and it was wonderful to see all members in the Legislature come together to support this important legislation.

I want to acknowledge the efforts of the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, MPP Balkissoon, who introduced a private member's bill back in 2007, and again in 2009, to give this important month the recognition it deserves.

I also want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of the Ontario Black History Society and the many other stakeholders who have been part of this process for years and who joined us last week on this historic occasion. It was a great moment in our province, and I'm pleased that so many people turned out to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to support the staff at the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport for their continued work, and their efforts to make sure that this bill came into the Legislature and was successful in passing. Of course, the Black History Month Act, 2016, recognizes and celebrates the important contributions black Canadians have made in the history of this great province.

Black History Month was officially recognized in Canada in the early 1950s, when the Canadian Negro Women's Association petitioned Toronto city council. Nearly four decades ago, the Ontario Black History

Society initiated a formal celebration of February as Black History Month within the city of Toronto. That was back in 1979.

The growth and increasing acknowledgement of Black History Month in Ontario over the years owes a great deal to the society's hard work and dedication. Just 23 years ago, Ontario first proclaimed February as Black History Month, and this was done on the 200th anniversary of a law banning the importation of slaves into Upper Canada, a law which ultimately provided for the gradual ending of slavery.

Each year since then, the members of this House rise together to recognize the second month of each year as an occasion for everyone to celebrate the accomplishments of black Canadians and their contributions to our province's economy, our history and our culture. It's important that we pay tribute to this rich legacy.

But while we have celebrated February as Black History Month each year, it has not had official status here in Ontario. In 1995, the House of Commons of Canada officially recognized February as Black History Month, following a motion introduced by the first black Canadian woman elected to Parliament, the honourable Jean Augustine, MP for Etobicoke-Lakeshore. The motion was supported by all members of the House of Commons.

But only two provinces, British Columbia and Quebec, have had their own legislation—until now. This legislation is especially significant in Ontario because we are one of the most diverse and multicultural provinces in the federation. Ontario is characterized by its diverse and distinct culture, which strengthens and really brings us together based on our cultural ties. It is a society that continues to build itself on the diversity and heritage values that we hold dear to our hearts.

Recognizing and remembering our heritage through events like Black History Month helps us protect, preserve and promote our shared legacy. It helps us to remember who we are. Perhaps most important of all, it brings us closer together. We would be less than we are if we didn't recognize the accomplishments of black Ontarians. A fundamental part of Ontario's history has been the history of the black community.

I don't think many people in Ontario realize, but the first black man who arrived in Canada was back in 1603. His name was Mathieu Da Costa, and he arrived with Samuel de Champlain and acted as a translator between the explorers and the Mi'kmaq. At this time, for nearly two more centuries, slavery existed in Canada. In fact, the first recorded slave here in Canada was a seven-year-old from Madagascar back in 1628.

In 1793 the Upper Canada abolition act, supported by Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe, was enacted, making it illegal to bring slaves to Upper Canada, which made Canada the first jurisdiction in the British Empire to move towards the ending of slavery.

Many black Loyalists came here after the American Revolution and settled in the Maritimes, and black Canadian soldiers fought for this land during wars as far back as 1812.

Between 1800 and 1865, when the Civil War came to an end, we saw 30,000 black people escape to Canada using the Underground Railroad. One of the leaders of this movement was Harriet Tubman, who helped people flee slavery to find freedom here in Ontario. Tubman, herself a former slave, lived for 10 years in the beautiful riding of St. Catharines.

While many Ontarians know the name of Harriet Tubman, they may not be familiar with names like Josiah Henson, a former slave from Maryland who escaped to Canada with his family in 1830 and settled near present-day Dresden. His life inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe to write the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Ontarians also may not know the name of Anderson Ruffin Abbott of Toronto, who in 1861 became the first black doctor; or Mary Ann Shadd, founder of the *Provincial Freeman* newspaper in Chatham back in 1853 and the first black woman in North America to become a publisher and the first female publisher in Canada; or Willie O'Ree, the NHL's first black hockey player.

Many may not know of the black volunteers back in 1812 who fought at Queenston Heights and Fort George, and other black Canadian men and women who defended Canada throughout its proud history. Black soldiers have fought in every single war this country has had.

There are many other stories, such as the black settlement stories across Ontario like that of the Queen's Bush Settlement back in the early 19th century in an area between Lake Huron and Waterloo county. More than 1,500 slaves and former slaves established farms throughout the region, building churches, schools and a strong, vibrant community life.

There are stories of inspiration and hope, like that of the Puce River black community near Windsor. The black community of Puce River was one of the first settled in Ontario by blacks in the early 1800s. Many former slaves found their way to Puce River and the town of Lakeshore through the Underground Railroad. This was a long journey, but many slaves came to Canada because they could find freedom.

For centuries, black Canadians have played a proud role in helping to build our economic, political, social and cultural landscape here in this province. Black History Month is an important way to learn where we have been and to reflect on where we are now.

Because of Black History Month celebrations, generations of Ontarians have grown up with a better understanding of the contributions that black Canadians have made in this province and in this country. From Nova Scotia to Ontario, and later out to western Canada, black Canadians have been part of Canada's story from the early days. Today, there are nearly a million black Canadians throughout our country, most of them in Ontario.

My parents arrived in Canada when I was a child. They chose to make Ontario their home because they knew that this was, and remains, one of the best places in the world to live, a place where people can come, they can find opportunity, they can build a life and they can grow and maybe one day have their son running a bank or being a member in the provincial Parliament—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Premier of Ontario.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Premier of Ontario—or Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

This is the same promise that drew black Canadians to Canada over the last few hundred years and it's part of our proud history as Ontarians. It's an enriched history, with political contributions from people like Lincoln Alexander, the first black member of Parliament; Senator Anne Cools, the first black senator in Canada; and of course Dr. Alvin Curling, the first Caribbean Canadian Speaker of the Ontario Legislature. My colleague Bas Balkissoon succeeded Alvin as the MPP for Scarborough—Rouge River. His legacy, along with the legacy of others like former MPP Zanana Akande, the first black woman elected to the Ontario Legislature—we need to remember the legacy of these Canadians who have done so much to make sure that we can continue to build this great province.

1540

We look at today, Mr. Speaker, and we look into the past. We know people in music, like Oscar Peterson, and today people like Drake, who is the number one streamed artist on the planet, The Weeknd, and of course people like Cameron Bailey, who is the artistic director for TIFF.

I think, as a black Canadian, and I know that my colleagues here in the Legislature would agree with me, that black Canadians have played a significant role in the development of this province and will continue to play that role. I just want to thank all the members for supporting this historic legislation. I want to thank the Premier for making sure that this was an item she thought was something we should move forward on to recognize the contribution of black Canadians here in the Legislature. I just want to say thank you to everyone for this opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to respond on behalf of the official opposition to this ministerial statement as once again in this House we acknowledge February as Black History Month in the province of Ontario. I gave a rather lengthy speech about this issue when we discussed the bill last week, which I won't repeat, but I was very pleased to join the Premier, the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and others at the Lieutenant Governor's suite last Tuesday to be present for the royal assent of Bill 159, An Act to proclaim the month of February as Black History Month.

Earlier that day, as you'll recall, Mr. Speaker, the bill had received the unanimous support of the House and actually received first, second, and third reading in one day, a remarkable example of all-party co-operation. I would add that my friend the member for Scarborough—Rouge River deserves enormous credit for initially suggesting the idea of enshrining Black History Month in the statutes of Ontario back in 2007 and 2009.

Why is all this important? We receive the answer from Rosemary Sadlier, who for more than 20 years served as

the president of the Ontario Black History Society. Rosemary wrote that the annual observation of black history is important for young African Canadians who need to “feel affirmed, to be aware of the contributions made by other blacks in Canada, have role models, and understand the social forces that have shaped and influenced their community.”

For all of us in this House and in communities across the province, Black History Month serves as a reminder of the compelling life stories which inspire and compel: inspire us to be worthy of the province we've inherited through the extraordinary accomplishment, courage and sacrifice of the generations who came before us; and compel us to take action in our daily lives and to speak out against the last vestiges of racism, injustice and intolerance wherever they may still exist.

Black history is Ontario's history, and together we look to a future, as Martin Luther King Jr. so eloquently dreamed, where everyone—everyone—will be judged not “by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.”

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses? *Interjection.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There's more time, so I'm just offering them an opportunity.

The member from London—Fanshawe for responses.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: On behalf of the NDP caucus, it is my pleasure to rise to lend our voice to the celebration of Black History Month. This year, 2016, marks the 20th anniversary since Black History Month was first officially celebrated by the government of Canada. The month-long celebration was formally recognized following a motion introduced in the House of Commons by the first black Canadian woman elected to Parliament, the Honourable Jean Augustine.

We also humbly recognize that this coming August 1 will mark the 182nd anniversary of the abolishment of slavery in Canada. As Canadians, we are proud to have been a haven to those seeking refuge from the practice of slavery. The Underground Railroad brought between 30,000 and 40,000 black slaves north to freedom in Canada, with many of them settling in southern Ontario and Atlantic Canada, specifically Nova Scotia. The settlement and history of African and Caribbean Canadians is a defining facet to our identity as a country and as a society.

Black History Month in Ontario provides us with a month full of opportunities to reflect and celebrate the notable black Canadians from so many fields who have played defining roles in our history. We are truly humbled and grateful for the contributions of black Canadians, from Harriet Tubman, the runaway slave from Maryland who became known as the Moses of her people and the conductor who led hundreds of slaves to freedom along the Underground Railroad, to Lincoln Alexander, who was appointed Ontario's 24th Lieutenant Governor, the first member of a visible minority to serve as the Queen's representative in Canada.

Black History Month is an essential celebration; however, it is important for us to go beyond just the

celebration and open our eyes to the realities of the lived experiences of black people in our community today. There are incredible stories in the black community of strength, courage and perseverance in the face of adversity that date back to the beginning of time, and that are not found in our history books. Sadly, these are not the lessons often taught in our elementary or secondary schools. From the story of black employees on the Canadian railways fighting discrimination to the overrepresentation of blacks within our criminal justice system, we must strive to paint an accurate picture of the black experience in Canada and record it, engrain it into the very fabric of our curriculums.

Because if we look, there are signs out there we have not learned the lessons from the past that we believe we have. The rise of the Black Lives Matter campaign is a key example. This campaign emerged as a direct response to the police shootings of black men in the US. Here in Toronto, the campaign is highlighting the problems of racial profiling through the use of carding. On one hand, we can understand this as a movement of empowerment and engagement; on the other hand, it is rooted in resistance to the anti-black racism that still exists in today's society.

I challenge each and every one of us here in this Legislature and everyone else in this province and country to take personal responsibility for promoting the elimination of the very real, day-to-day, systemic and institutionalized barriers faced by black people in our communities. While the newly announced Anti-Racism Directorate is a most welcome announcement that will help to address many of these barriers, the fact that the directorate is deemed as necessary by thousands of Ontarians is living proof that while we have come a long way, we still have a long road ahead of us.

As this month draws to a close, I encourage all members to participate in the local and regional Black History Month celebrations in our communities. These celebrations can open your eyes to a thriving African and Caribbean culture in Canada, even under the most challenging circumstances.

I'm very proud to be the citizenship and immigration critic and to respond today to Black History Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their comments.

PETITIONS

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas many residents and businesses in Ontario rely on the ability to drive a vehicle in order to work, buy food and otherwise function;

"Whereas licence suspension upon receipt of a medical notice to that effect is immediate; and

"Whereas constituents are forced to wait 30 business days following a positive medical review by their physician prior to being reinstated; and

"Whereas this wait time is not prescribed in any legislation or regulation, but is solely due to Ministry of Transportation policies that ignore the reality of living and operating a business, especially in rural and northern Ontario; and

"Whereas a needlessly long licence suspension threatens the livelihoods of many families in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To direct the Ministry of Transportation to institute a five-business-day service guarantee for drivers' licence reinstatements following the submission of a positive physician's review."

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Owen.

1550

RURAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to introduce this petition signed by 740 members of my community, "To preserve community schools," which reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas it is right for Ontario youth to be educated in their home communities;

"Whereas accessible schools that students can walk, bike or take a short ride to promote healthy lifestyles, a cleaner environment and emotional well-being;

"Whereas the economies of small rural towns are directly strengthened and vitalized by high schools in their own communities;

"Whereas community schools best serve special populations;

"Whereas rural high schools more than 15 km from the next high school should be considered eligible for enhanced top-up funding;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To direct support and resources to Ontario rural community schools, such as Harrow District High School, so as to provide and sustain accessible education for youth within their home communities, preserving and sustaining rural town culture that diversifies the fabric of the province of Ontario."

I couldn't agree more. I will affix my name to the petition and send it to the Clerks' table via page Suzanne.

HOME INSPECTION INDUSTRY

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the home inspector industry remains largely unregulated; and

"Whereas homeowners are increasingly reliant on home inspectors to make an educated home purchase; and

"Whereas the unregulated industry poses a risk to consumers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To protect consumers by regulating the home inspection industry and licensing home inspectors."

I agree with the petition and will leave it with Erin to take to the table.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Rick Nicholls: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads and hospitals; and

"Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

"Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don't have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

"Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario's Hydro One."

I approve of this petition, and I send it along with the wonderful page from Chatham-Kent-Essex, Delaney.

RURAL SCHOOLS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It represents people in the member from Essex's riding, as well as my own. It's signed by five of 10 school board trustees.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas it is right for Ontario youth to be educated in their home communities;

"Whereas accessible schools that students can walk, bike or take a short ride to promote healthy lifestyles, a cleaner environment and emotional well-being;

"Whereas the economies of small rural towns are directly strengthened and vitalized by high schools in their own communities;

"Whereas community schools best serve special populations;

"Whereas rural high schools more than 15 km from the next high school should be considered eligible for enhanced top-up funding;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To direct support and resources to Ontario rural community schools, such as Harrow District High School, so as to provide and sustain accessible education for youth within their home communities, preserving and sustaining rural town culture that diversifies the fabric of the province of Ontario."

I fully support this petition, and will sign it and send it to the Clerks' table.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to read this petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my name and send it to the table with page Sarah.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm receiving more petitions.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together

through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Xavier to take to the table.

WAY-FINDING SIGNS

Mr. Michael Mantha: My petition is titled "For Way-Finding Signs on MTO Roads in Northern Ontario."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the MTO currently does not allow established trail way-finding signs on MTO highways, and way-finding signs are helpful in guiding cyclists in northern Ontario where we often have no other options than using MTO roads;

"Whereas cycling tourism has become a significant part of Manitoulin's tourist economy, with an established network of cycling routes, many of which cannot be done without travelling on portions of MTO highways;

"Whereas Manitoulin's economic development hinges on making tourists feel welcome and safe;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To allow way-finding signs on MTO roads in northern Ontario and to immediately allow a pilot project of way-finding signs on MTO road sections of cycling routes found in MICA's Manitoulin Island and LaCloche Mountains Cycling Routes and Road Map."

I agree with this petition, put my name to it and give it to page Erin to bring it down to the Clerks' table.

CAREGIVERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Northumberland—Quinte West. I saw you.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Good, good. I'm not very tall, Speaker, so I have to stand on my tippytoes.

I have a petition here. Actually, it's bilingual, but in lieu of my French capabilities, I'll stick to the English version.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are over 2.6 million caregivers to a family member, a friend or a neighbour in Ontario;

"Whereas these caregivers work hard to provide care to those that are most in need even though their efforts are often overlooked;

"Whereas one third of informal caregivers are distressed, which is twice as many as four years ago;

"Whereas without these caregivers, the health care system and patients would greatly suffer in Ontario;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP Gélinas's bill to proclaim the first Tuesday of every April as Family Caregiver Day to increase recognition and awareness of family caregivers in Ontario."

I will sign this petition and send it to the Clerk with Andrew.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Julia Munro: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I've affixed my signature as I am in agreement.

1600

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition entitled "Hydro One Not for Sale!" and it reads as follows:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

"Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

"Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don't have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

"Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario's Hydro One."

I fully support this petition, affix my name to it and will give it to page Andrew to take to the table.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Randy Hillier: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for Hydro One networks.

"Whereas the cost of electricity in Ontario continues to escalate; and

"Whereas other charges associated with electricity, such as delivery, regulatory, global adjustment and debt retirement charges make electricity increasingly unaffordable; and

"Whereas these costs have imposed a significant hardship on ratepayers and driven industry and jobs out of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Premier and the Minister of Energy reduce the waste and duplication in Ontario's electricity sector and take other necessary steps to lower the cost of electricity so that Ontario's electricity prices are competitive with other jurisdictions."

I'm firmly in favour of this petition and I will sign it and hand it off to the page.

RURAL SCHOOLS

Ms. Catherine Fife: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas it is right for Ontario youth to be educated in their home communities;

"Whereas accessible schools that students can walk, bike or take a short ride to promote healthy lifestyles, a cleaner environment and emotional well-being;

"Whereas the economies of small rural towns are directly strengthened and vitalized by high schools in their own communities;

"Whereas community schools best serve special populations;

"Whereas rural high schools more than 15 km from the next high school should be considered eligible for enhanced top-up funding;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To direct support and resources to Ontario rural community schools, such as Harrow District High School, so as to provide and sustain accessible education for youth within their home communities, preserving and sustaining rural town culture that diversifies the fabric of the province of Ontario."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature to this petition and give it to page Micah.

OPPOSITION DAY

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I move that:

Whereas the 2016 Ontario budget is soon to be introduced in the Legislature;

Whereas hydro bills have continued to skyrocket across the province, making it harder for seniors and families to get by;

Whereas the cost of the Liberal government's scandals, waste and mismanagement is taking away funding for essential services;

Whereas the Liberal government's cuts to front-line health care mean Ontario's patients are being denied the quality health care they deserve; and

Whereas the Liberal government has no credible plan to balance the budget;

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls on the Liberal government to include the following in the 2016 Ontario budget:

(1) a credible plan to make energy affordable, which shall include halting any further sale of shares in Hydro One;

(2) a plan to properly manage Ontario's health care system, which shall include reversing the current and planned cuts to doctors, nurses and hospitals; and

(3) a credible plan to balance the budget and take immediate action to pay down the debt.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Fedeli has moved opposition day number 1. Mr. Fedeli.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I want to take some time to address each of our requests in detail, and talk about the concerns we heard during the pre-budget consultations.

Speaker, I start off by talking about the pre-budget consultations because all three parties, at some expense to the taxpayer, toured five cities outside of Toronto and then spent two days here in Toronto. We spent time in Hamilton, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa and then back here in Toronto, listening to the people of Ontario, all the while the budget was being written, translated and printed without any input from the very people throughout the province who were going out of their way to come to these various hearings and tell us their stories.

It was very, very disheartening to see that the budget is being delivered tomorrow as opposed to the traditional time, after the federal budget, sometime in late March or April. They've rushed this budget and, sadly, did not listen to any of the people of Ontario.

Let me tell a story, Speaker, on the hydro. We're talking about a credible plan to make energy affordable, which shall include halting any further sale of the shares of hydro.

Two days ago, I got a text and then a follow-up phone call from a friend of mine in Trout Creek, Ontario, in the south end of my riding. His name is Steve Ciglen. He runs a little shop in behind his house called Ciggies Custom Woodworking. I like to visit there. It's a lot of fun. He has got a wonderful wife, Sheryl, two great kids, Braxton and Jayla. It's a lot of fun going there. If anybody likes to tinker with woodworking, he has got a great little shop and a couple of employees.

He texted me and said, "Vic, my hydro bill this month is \$904.23." If that's not bad enough, if that doesn't make your eyes roll, he was closed for a week, and then his power was shut off—as was mine at home—for five days. So you've got 12 days without power—we're talking just a little over half a month—and his bill was \$904.23.

He said to me, "Vic, what am I going to do? This is quite a bit higher." I said, "Steve, we talked before. I told you that these guys were going to put your hydro bill up on January 1 and take your 10% away." That, of course, is indeed what happened, but it was just a shock.

We heard that a lot from people in our constituency offices. I'm pretty sure the government is getting the same phone calls we're getting, but they don't really seem to talk about those. Steve Ciglen said to me, "You know, Vic, I wanted to hire another guy in my shop, but I don't think I can." In fact, I talked to him today, when I asked for his permission to share the story and the amount of his power bill, and he said, "I've decided I can't hire that extra guy. I just can't."

We talked about the fact that we have the highest hydro rates in North America. Then he got on the other topics as well. He's just a small business guy with a couple of employees. We talked about the upcoming pension plan as well. He talked about the fact that with all of these extra costs, he just cannot see how he can expand. But it's the hydro bill that is just the clincher to put him over the edge. Somebody today doesn't have a job over that hydro bill that he received.

Our hydro rates have quadrupled since 2003. Business groups continue to complain we're uncompetitive. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce, in their latest report—when you see confidence in business tumbling from 47% down to 30% and lower, this has got to be a wake-up call to the government that something is wrong. Something is terribly wrong. When you've got the president and CEO, Sergio Marchionne, from Fiat Chrysler saying, "Ontario, you've become too high-cost a jurisdiction to do business." These are the messages.

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I can tell you an example in my hometown: Arclin. Now, when I was a young kid—this is a company that has been there almost 60 years—it was the Reichhold plant. It was Reichhold Chemicals. Everybody knew it. It was several city blocks, hundreds of employees, always there. It had just been a fixture in North Bay. Well, today, the lights are off. There's nothing there, just this empty shell of a company, no employees. They pulled out of North Bay. On the front page of the North Bay Nugget was a story that they pulled out because of hydro rates. They said that this plant in North Bay was the most expensive hydro of all of their 13 plants in North America, plain and simple.

When I travelled with MPP Rick Nicholls to his riding, we toured a greenhouse. This was a couple of years ago now. We toured this greenhouse and the owner was telling us the fact that he wanted to double the size of his facility, add 100 people and spend countless dollars building a twin greenhouse. We ran into him here at Queen's Park at one of the receptions, just before the winter break. I said to him, "Peter, how did the expansion go? Did you ever build that greenhouse and add those 100 employees?" He said, "Vic, I want you to know. I did, indeed, build that greenhouse. I spent \$100 million building the greenhouse and hired 100 people, except I built it in Ohio." He told us that he went to Ohio because he could not afford the energy rates here in Ontario. Then he told me of his pal who did the same thing as he did, except he opened in Pennsylvania. They both have cheap power, and a lot of that power comes from the province

of Ontario, and we pay the States and Quebec every single night to take it from us.

These are real stories from real people and real corporations who have either left Ontario, expanded out of Ontario or are not hiring people, all because we have the highest hydro rates in North America. Again, our first ask: We ask this government for a credible plan to make energy affordable, and that includes halting any further sale of the shares of Hydro One.

Our second ask: We heard the same thing as we travelled Ontario on these pre-budget consultations. We ask this government for a plan to properly manage Ontario's health care system, which shall include reversing the current and planned cuts to doctors, nurses and hospitals.

Speaker, let me give you an example. You hear about cuts to hospitals. Not doctors or nurses, for a moment—we'll get to that in a second—but hospitals. They say, "We're cutting hospital beds." I often wondered, what does that mean? What does that technically mean? What does that actually mean? My wife, Patty, and I were visiting friends of ours, Jan and Joe. One of them was in the hospital, and we were visiting. They were in a double room. They said, "Have a look in the room next door." So I slid the curtain open and looked, and it was vacant, just absolutely empty. The bed was gone. The little table was gone. The phone was gone. The TV was gone. Just the electronics that are built into the wall—that's all that was left there. You have to realize what the heck that means. So I asked one of the nurses on duty and she said, "Yes. When they say they're closing a bed, they actually take the bed, fold it up, put it downstairs and cover it in plastic." They closed 60 beds in the hospital in my city of North Bay.

When I was mayor of North Bay only a few years ago, I was there for the ribbon-cutting of this brand new multi-hundred-gajillion-dollar hospital, and now here we are and 60 beds are gone. Today there are 350 fewer employees in that hospital than there were only a couple of years ago. Just this past year, only months ago, they let 158 people go—cuts to front-line health care. This is what's happening when you cannot balance the budget, when you have these wild deficits, when you have waste, mismanagement and scandal.

People say, "Vic, where are you guys going to find the money to do all these things, then?" Well, I refer back to that. You stop the waste, you begin to manage properly with the assets that you have and the resources you have, and you don't get involved in these scandals.

You can find a billion dollars to close a gas plant, but you can't find money to keep 60 hospital beds open in a brand new hospital? You can't find money for those 350 men and women who you fired? You can't find that, but you can find \$410 million to bail out a US owner of the MaRS building across the street? Now, don't get me wrong; the MaRS people do wonderful work. I'm talking about the realtor who owns the building. We found out only through the little brown envelope that was slid under the door during the election that this government secretly

paid \$410 million to bail out a US-owned company. They can find that \$410 million without telling anybody, but you can't find money for the 100 nurses that you fired in North Bay, let alone the hundreds—everybody here on this side has a story that they'll tell you. The other side has those stories, too; they don't want to tell you about them.

This is what happens. The Auditor General warned us that this was going to happen. In 2014, in her report to us, she talked about the crowding out of services; that if you continue to spend and grow these deficits and add to the debt, which was then, of course, as now, approaching \$300 billion, you are going to—and her words were “crowd out” the very services that men and women in the province of Ontario—families, seniors and kids—all require.

Nothing. Crickets. Nothing happened over there for a full year. The Auditor General, just this December, in her latest report, almost took her 2014 report word for word and repeated that. She repeated it because nobody here on the government side, the Liberal side, did anything about it. So she said, “Ahem. I'm going to tell you the same thing again this year, and maybe now you'll do something about it.” In the meantime, this crowding out has become real. We had diabetes testing strips that were cut. We have physiotherapy for seniors gone—cut from 100 sessions a year to four. We have cataract surgeries gone—cut. These are real cuts that affect real people every single day, because as the Auditor General told us, you're crowding out the services that we need.

It has to stop. That's why we're asking, in our motion today, for a plan to properly manage the health care system. The resources are there. They're just frittering them away on waste, mismanagement and scandal.

Our third ask is that we're talking about a credible—and I have to underline it; if there was such a way to visually underline the word “credible”—plan to balance the budget and take immediate action to pay down the debt. Before I got back down here this afternoon, I was telling a friend that I'm going to be talking about this, and he said to me—and I wrote this down—“Debt is like body weight. It's the easiest thing to increase and the hardest to decrease.” He hit the nail on the head; I can attest to that. But it is no joke, right? It's so easy. Wave the magic wand, pixie dust, throw it out, we'll do that. You want that? We'll give you that. You want that? Let's have it.

But somebody has got to pay these bills, and our bills are massive. We are going to hit \$300 billion in debt—\$300 billion. We are. The province of Ontario is the largest subnational debtor in the world. That's what we're number one in.

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka, I say, we used to be number one in mining—the number one mining jurisdiction in the world. Today, we've fallen to 23rd, but we are the number one largest subdebtor nation in the world. This is what has happened to us.

Now the government will continue to claim that they're going to balance the budget, but all we've seen is red ink. Every single year: deficit, deficit, deficit. We're going to see another deficit tomorrow. They're going to tell us, “Look, the deficit is coming down.” But we learned how that deficit was reduced. In the fall economic statement, they had to come clean. On page 99, page 100, we saw that the sale of Hydro One—that money went right into general revenue. We saw that. That's very clear. They've been outed. We now know. If you look at pages 106 and 107 of the fall economic statement, it alludes to the fact that the cap-and-trade monies—\$300 million this year, \$1.3 billion next year—are all going right into general revenue as well.

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Let me just talk very briefly about the shell game that they play, where they'll say, “No, no, no. This money is for transit and infrastructure.” Well, technically, very technically, they're correct. They're going to put that money into transit and infrastructure. However, what the fall economic statement showed us—and with their Bill 144, the finance bill that came out—is that they will now have a mechanism to take the money that was already in the infrastructure budget, take that out and put it against the deficit. So it's all buzz words. The bottom line: The \$130 billion in infrastructure was there in 2014; it was there in 2015. It never needed the sale of Hydro One to make that, except last year. It's always selling something to make up the difference. So you wonder why the people of Ontario don't believe this government anymore.

If you remember a couple of years ago, when they talked about having a “path to balance,” well, Speaker, we know there was no path to balance. Their own documents that we revealed from the gas plant scandal proved there was no path to balance; they had a multi-billion-dollar hole in their budget. The Financial Accountability Officer confirmed what was in those documents just this fall.

So I want to read, just briefly, a little bit of information that we saw from the Financial Accountability Officer. It's technical, Speaker, I'll give you that, but, when you have a debt of \$300 billion and a deficit that is spewing red ink, every year, for a decade, it's important that we acknowledge this.

The government told us that they're going to balance by 2017-18. The Financial Accountability Officer said, “Well, look, you have spending planned at 4.3% of growth. We're not going to make that, so you should reduce that number to 3%. That's a fair number to use in your growth, and if you do that, you should drop your revenue by about a billion dollars.” Well, the government listened to half of it. They did drop the number from 4.3% to 2.9%—even a little better than the Financial Accountability Officer said. So we're going to have less revenue, is what that tells us. But instead of taking the rest of the Financial accountability Officer's story—he said that if you're claiming less revenue, you should lower it by a billion. Instead, they raised it by a billion. So how can you possibly tell the world that we're not

going to have 4.3% growth, we're not going to have \$124 billion in revenue, that our growth is only going to be 2.9%; and somehow, magically, that jumps up to \$125 billion in revenue. Their math, clearly, is not good.

We'll be looking very closely at the budget tomorrow to see, how do you get less growth and more revenue? We'll be very excited to see how they come to that number, because that's voodoo math. That's the Liberal math. We know that now. We know that because the finance minister, yesterday and the day before, called our asks fantasy. He said that our pre-budget asks are a fantasy. So somehow, now, asking for affordable hydro for Steve Ciglan and his wife and kids is a fantasy. Somehow, asking to restore the cuts, the 60 beds that were closed in my hospital and many others—somehow, that's a fantasy.

These people are so out of touch with reality, with real people, with real stories—stories I've talked about in this Legislature and they all heard: families who are feeling the pain, seniors who are going hungry because their caregiver hasn't got the time in the home to give them a meal. That's a real story we heard. Somebody who fell down out of weakness on their front steps because they were released from hospital too soon—that's a real story we heard. Speaker, those are real stories from real people, and that's why we're asking for our three recommendations to be acknowledged by this government and that they take our recommendations and implement them. I thank you very much for this opportunity to speak, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the member from Nipissing for bringing this motion before us today. It does provide MPPs with an opportunity to highlight what Ontarians have a right to expect to see in the budget tomorrow, so I'm very pleased to be able to participate in the debate.

The text of the motion that is before us today identifies three priorities that that member's party would like to see in the budget tomorrow. We on this side of the House don't quite see eye to eye with those three priorities. However, we do see a need to address several other important issues that have a very direct and immediate impact on the people whom we represent in our communities.

We also see the need to call on the government to ensure that the budget addresses the issues that were raised and the input that was provided during the pre-budget consultations that were held in January. Speaker, as we now know, over that period of weeks that the pre-budget consultation was going on, the finance ministry officials were busy with government and political staffers, working on the document that's going to arrive on our desks tomorrow. So I think there was a real missed opportunity to actually incorporate some of that input that was provided.

One of those 140 witnesses who appeared before the finance committee as it went through this sham of a

public input process was London's mayor, Matt Brown. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the input that London's mayor presented because, definitely for myself as the member for London West and for my colleague as the member for London-Fanshawe, we would like to see the input that the mayor gave included in the budget that's going to be presented tomorrow.

Mayor Brown spoke on behalf of Londoners; he spoke on behalf of London's business community; he spoke on behalf of London's health care and educational institutions. He really iterated strongly that Londoners have a single key priority, one key ask, that they are putting forward to the province of Ontario that they would like to see—that they need to see—in the budget tomorrow, and that is a commitment to fund public transportation in our city.

Speaker, when the mayor made this presentation, he wasn't just talking on behalf of council—although council did unanimously endorse, just in November, a proposal on how London's rapid transit initiative could be implemented in our city. He wasn't just speaking on behalf of council; he was speaking on behalf of the 13,000 Londoners who participated in public engagement sessions over the last two years on our rapid transit initiatives and he was speaking on behalf of the thousands more Londoners who provided input into London's official plan, the London Plan. That plan is built entirely around the opportunities to grow inward and upward, and that, of course, revolves around an efficient way of moving people throughout the city and it requires a new transit system.

Speaker, the mayor, in his comments to the budget committee, was also speaking on behalf of the people whom I represent in London West and the people whom the member from London-Fanshawe represents and the people who are represented by the President of the Treasury Board over in London North Centre. I want to commend the member for London-Fanshawe for the questions she asked this morning about whether Londoners could expect to see a commitment to rapid transit in the budget tomorrow because London has done the work to line up the federal partners. They've secured a willing commitment from the federal government to participate in getting this rapid transit initiative off the ground, and London has allocated \$125 million in its own budget, but it needs a firm commitment that the province will be at the table as a funding partner in this initiative.

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This morning, we heard the Minister of Transportation say that certainly the province would commit to reviewing London's proposal. We need more than a commitment to review; we need a promise that the province will step up and fund this proposal. London is Canada's eleventh-largest city and the sixth-largest city in Ontario, but it is the largest city in the entire country that does not have a rapid transit system.

The minister said that the proposal would be reviewed just like a proposal from any of the other 440 municipalities that might be submitting proposals. But this ignores

the fact that Londoners have been engaged for years in the process of developing and bringing forward the proposal that is on the minister's desk. It also ignores the fact that London's per capita ridership on our current transit system is much larger than any comparable city in the province. We have 63 riders per capita versus 23 riders in York region.

That is one of the priorities that I, as the member for London West—and, I'm sure, the member for London—Fanshawe and my entire caucus—would definitely like to see in that budget tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am pleased to speak to this motion this afternoon. Our government has a credible plan that invests in people's talents and skills, in critical infrastructure projects, strengthens retirement security and builds a dynamic business climate. Our top priority remains growing the economy and creating jobs for Ontarians.

Given the current state of economic uncertainty, we felt it was important to let Ontario businesses know, through the 2016 budget, that we will invest in our economy and create jobs. We are also committed to creating a low-carbon economy through a cap-and-trade system, and the budget will set the stage for Ontario to be part of the 2017 carbon auction.

The Ontario economy is among the strongest for economic growth in Canada at the moment. Our 2015 Q3 results showed that Ontario's real GDP has grown by 0.9%, outpacing both the Canadian and US economies. We ranked first for direct foreign investment in North America for the second year in a row, and we were the only province in Canada to gain jobs in the month of January.

Since the recession, Ontario has created more than 600,000 jobs—608,300, to be exact—and almost all of them are full-time. Also, as reflected in our January job numbers, our unemployment rate of 6.7% is beating the national unemployment rate of 7.2%, and private sector economists are forecasting that Ontario will continue to grow.

I want to give a few examples. According to the Conference Board of Canada, just yesterday, Ontario will be one of the growth leaders in 2016. In November, BMO said that Ontario's economy is expected to be among the top performers this year. According to the CIBC's top growth indicators, Ontario has "moved to the top of the heap." This was in November. In December, RBC said, "Ontario is poised to be among the faster-growing provincial economies in 2016...." According to TD in January, "B.C. and Ontario are entering 2016 with the strongest forward momentum...." This is not something that the government is stating; this is something that private sector economists independent from the government are forecasting.

I wanted to say something about our competitiveness. Corporate income tax rates in Ontario are 13 percentage points lower than the average combined federal-state

corporate income tax in the United States. Ontario is the only subnational in North America that hosts five major auto assemblers; even Michigan doesn't have as many. We've strengthened our economic relationships through trips to China, Japan, India, New York City and Chicago.

We are implementing our plan while eliminating the deficit in a way that is fair, that supports economic growth and new jobs. We are committed to balancing the budget by 2017-18. In fact, 2014-15 marked the sixth year in a row that we reported both lower-than-projected program expenses and a lower deficit.

Our plan includes, as you know, Mr. Speaker, making historic infrastructure investments—more than \$134 billion over the next 10 years, supporting more than 110,000 jobs per year.

I want to add that as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, I have the privilege of being a member of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. This year, as mentioned by the member from Nipissing, we travelled to Hamilton, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Ottawa. We also had two days of public hearings here in Toronto, where the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Charles Sousa, appeared to hear from committee members about what mattered most to them from the public hearings.

As a committee member, what I heard is that the people of Ontario want their government to invest in their future. They want a government that protects the vital services they rely on, that builds infrastructure and grows the economy and creates jobs.

The issues and concerns raised in consultations are reflected in the decisions our government makes. This will include the upcoming 2016 budget.

Also, as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, I participated in pre-budget hearings through the Ministry of Finance, and also in tele-town halls. This year, I travelled through York region, London, Kitchener-Waterloo.

The member from London West was mentioning just a few minutes ago that the mayor made a presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. He also made a presentation to one of the ministry's pre-budget hearings in London. So I had the pleasure of meeting him and talking to him about his proposal, and I heard from him twice.

Including SCOFEA, in total we have conducted 20 in-person consultations in 12 cities and heard from over 700 people. This means that there was a total of nine weeks of engagement—in person, online, written and by telephone consultation.

For the second year in a row, our government also listened to Ontarians through a digital platform. We launched Budget Talks, where over 6,500 Ontarians registered as users. The feedback we received overall has been very valuable as we continue with this process, and those voices will be reflected in the budget.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude by saying that we are concerned about the needs of the province, the needs of Ontarians, and I hope to see that reflected in tomorrow's budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Just to remind those who are viewing, we are talking about an opposition day motion, put forward by our finance critic today, that's calling for the government to include three things in tomorrow's budget:

- a credible plan to make energy affordable, and stop the sale of shares in Hydro One;

- a plan to properly manage Ontario's health care system; and

- a credible plan to pay down the debt and balance the budget.

Our finance critic, Mr. Fedeli, did an outstanding job in explaining all of those things.

I am one of our energy critics, specifically with a focus on halting the sale of Hydro One shares in Ontario. It's hard for me to actually express the anger that residents of Ontario have shared with me when it comes to the sale of Hydro One.

First, I'd like to address one of the arguments that the energy minister makes all the time: that selling Hydro One won't result in higher hydro rates because we have the Ontario Energy Board. He says it all the time. The minister knows, or he ought to know, that the OEB makes its determination about rates based on cost to service and return on equity.

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He also knows, because the Auditor General told us all, that Hydro One is currently facing a \$4-million infrastructure deficit, caused by the fact that a quarter of its transmission infrastructure is at the end of its service life. Somebody's going to end up paying for all that. The OEB already granted the first of what will no doubt be many increases to Hydro One, effective February 1. It was 1.9% on top of the big increases that we saw back on January 1 to hydro bills across the province. I suspect that the minister knows this, and that's why his argument is never that rates won't go up, it's that Hydro One doesn't have the final say over its own rates—which is the answer to a question that nobody ever really asked. Then, again, those tend to be the kinds of answers that this government gives us.

This is a democracy. The best public opinion research that we have puts opposition to selling Hydro One at 75%, and many surveys that we've seen have it at over 80% of people not happy. They don't want the sale of Hydro One to continue. The members opposite are hearing the same things in their constituency offices.

Ultimately, the people get to decide how they want to be governed. When more than 75%, and in many cases over 80%, of the people are opposed to something, we're compelled as democratic representatives to represent them, to listen to them and to act here in the Legislature. When you hear people rage about how disconnected politics and government are from their real life, this is what they're talking about: It's the sell-off of Hydro One. It takes a profound level of arrogance to look at 80% of

the population and tell them, "You are wrong, and we know better than you."

Part of that anger is a belief that insiders are gaming the system, too, not dissimilar to the way that the main benefactors of the cap-and-trade we saw unveiled today will be the lawyers and the lobbyists, not the ice caps or the forests. The chief accomplishment of the sale of Hydro One to this point has been to make a lot of money for the people who already have a lot of money. That's why more than 22,000 shares are owned by just three members of the Hydro One board of directors.

We move on. The number of complaints in my office when it comes to problems with Hydro One billing hasn't gone down since the first sell-off. I would say it's actually increased, and probably most in the House would agree that they've seen an increase in complaints, too, especially with the increases in the bills that we've experienced. The level of customer service has not improved. If anything, we've seen more blackouts and higher electricity bills.

I'd like to provide a couple of instances of ridiculous overbilling in addition to a further account of one that I raised here in question period on Monday. One person in my riding, Ross, was overbilled \$4,300. After contesting the overbilling, Hydro One had to admit it made an error. They refused to provide him with a cheque to reimburse him for what he had overpaid. Instead, what they did is they opted to simply credit his account.

Another constituent was overbilled \$4,935 for his cottage. In recent years, his yearly bill had been \$400 or \$500. Now, he's getting that every month as a bill.

A small businessman in North Hastings has pretty much been through Hydro One hell. After a smart meter was installed, their reported consumption went through the roof. Hydro One was forced to admit the meter was faulty; it had used the wrong multiplier. As a result, he's been overbilled somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$49,000. That's a big hit for a small businessman.

Those are just a few incidents in my riding. There are other examples right across the province—many of them. Yet even this morning, we had the Premier doing her Marie Antoinette across the aisle here in the House, saying that the only way that we can have affordable energy in Ontario is to go back to coal or subsidize rates. How about we just end the stupidity that we've from this government over the last number of years? How about we go about restoring basic customer service?

Who's paying for this stupidity at the end of the day? It's the person who gets that hydro bill in the mail—the same 80% of the people the government is choosing to ignore. That's why I'll be supporting the motion put forward by our finance critic here this afternoon.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, I want to introduce future members of provincial Parliament, the students here for the model Parliament. I don't know if it's allowed, but perhaps the future MPPs could raise their hands and identify themselves now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the member, but they're not supposed to do that. But welcome to the Legislature. I hope you learn a lot from these very intelligent members.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Welcome to the Parliament of Ontario, Queen's Park. I would like to see more women put their hands up there, please.

It is a pleasure to join the debate today. I, as the finance critic and the critic for Treasury Board, am in a unique position. This part of this debate is that I'm the critic for saving, where the government is trying to save money, which is in all the wrong places, and where they are spending money. If you follow the money, they are not doing their due diligence from a fiscally responsible—actually, just basic common-sense management perspective.

This opposition day motion actually poses a really interesting quandary for us as New Democrats. Of course, we share the concerns of the PC caucus on where the cuts are actually happening. We've also borne witness, each and every single day at question period, as we raise those issues.

My colleague the finance critic—we spent seven full days listening to Ontarians. We were on trains, planes and automobiles. We got onto that chartered plane and we travelled all over Ontario. We listened to 140 delegations in person. We received hundreds of letters and reports from the people of this great province, asking us—imploping us, actually—to hold this government to account and to rethink where they are spending money.

Yet the quandary for us is that if you follow the money—that is really the question here. If we want to support the motion as it's portrayed, around health care and around education and around basic public services, then you have to find the money. So the question is, where is the money going here in the province of Ontario? We have only to look at the last five—since I've been here as a new MPP; I've only been here for three years—Auditor General reports, which very clearly indicate to us that this government has a serious ethical issue.

Budgets should be moral documents. Budgets should speak to the priorities of the people of this province, and then they should have the appropriate allocation of resources to support those priorities. Those priorities, in a democracy, should come from the people who come to speak to us. We are only here to represent the interests of the people of this province.

When those people come to us and they say, "We have been on a wait-list for two years for a long-term-care spot," when they come to us at these committees and they say—the Fix Our Schools group came to us and they showed us pictures of the deplorable state of schools in the province of Ontario because the government has backed off their original goal of ensuring that the maintenance fees and the maintenance funding for schools have been kept up. When that happens, we are challenged on this side of the House to embrace those comments that

were said earlier in the House today around working collaboratively and collectively to support this province.

Those Auditor General reports, for us, are basically, ironically, a road map to how to get this province back on track. A natural place for me to go in this conversation would be on the issue of road maintenance, being that I just mentioned a road map. That's really funny. If you were paying attention, you would laugh.

The Auditor General raised an issue, and this is a very simple example of how poorly run—or the lack of the integrity of the due diligence of how procurement of services are followed through at this place. The Auditor General raised the issue of how road maintenance contracts are procured and how they're awarded. There used to be a time and a place in this great province where the province and the Ministry of Transportation were directly responsible for ensuring that our roads were safe, that they were built with integrity, and that private companies were not coming to the public trough and making a huge amount of money at our expense. At that time, there was some oversight, some direct accountability. There was.

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The government has chosen a different path—a different road, if you will. The Auditor General indicated that those contracts were awarded in this province without proper due diligence. For instance, companies were awarded contracts to ensure that our roads were safe and cleared of snow when those companies did not even have the equipment to do so. So what does the government do? The government goes out and buys equipment so the company can do the job it bid on in the first place. Then, when that company failed to actually fulfill its responsibility per the contract it had with the government of Ontario, the Ministry of Transportation filed a fine for that company. We just learned in January that \$49 million worth of fines were issued to these companies that were contracted to do this work. I'm not even getting into the human cost of not keeping roads safe.

This is especially important for our northern communities, where they don't have a TTC, they don't have a rapid bus. They have so few options. The car is their only way to get around. I feel like I need to bring this, because we were in Thunder Bay, and this was a real issue. It's a connectivity issue; it's a productivity issue. In order for businesses to be successful, they need these roadways. So the Ministry of Transportation issues \$49 million worth of fines and fails to collect those fines. Well, that is a broken system, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at the Auditor General's reports and follow where the money is going or, more to the point, where the money is not going, one only has to look at infrastructure. There is not a day that goes by in this House that the Premier and every minister on that side of the House don't say how important infrastructure is. We all know how important infrastructure is. We also know how important social infrastructure is. We heard about the social infrastructure piece at the committee in Hamilton. The director of the Hamilton Roundtable for

Poverty Reduction pointed out that precarious employment affects approximately 44% of the employees in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

You were there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for being there with me that day.

Three quarters of everyone using a food bank are receiving their main income from the provincial government. This is not sustainable. I'm going to tell you why this exists. The provincial government is instituting hunger through its inability to fix the social assistance system, which has been broken for years. He implored this government to take action, because there are enough kids using food banks in Hamilton alone to fill 270 classrooms. We should all be ashamed of that number.

The reason this exists is directly related to the fact that we do not have a provincial strategy for affordable housing. Housing connects everything. The legal society said that they have to actually tell people that it makes more sense for them to get evicted from their poor housing situation than deal with the bureaucracy and red tape of a broken system of supportive housing. That supportive housing net is frayed; it is broken.

We heard that sometimes 60% of the students in Hamilton go from school to school. Do you know why they're not succeeding? They're hungry, and they are in a constant state of instability.

We share the belief that infrastructure matters. We do need an affordable supportive housing strategy. I know that the minister is going to come forward with this plan in the spring. I look forward to that plan, because that will underpin everything, Mr. Speaker.

But to the infrastructure piece: The Premier will stand up in this House and say that in order for us to have infrastructure, we have to sell Hydro One. They're going to broaden the ownership of Hydro One. You don't get any broader than the entire province of Ontario. We all owned Hydro One. That's as broad as you get. If you cut pieces of it off, you reduce the revenue that comes into this province, you compromise the health care system and you compromise the education system. I know there are good people on that side of the House who share our concerns.

Now we have the Financial Accountability Officer's report, which shows that after 2017-18, after this deficit is reduced off the backs of the most vulnerable people in the province of Ontario, then we'll start to see the revenue reduced from Hydro One. There is a correlation between the selling off of a public asset and the revenues that come into this place.

On infrastructure and the Auditor General—why this government is not looking more closely at how infrastructure is procured in the province of Ontario after the Auditor General released her report where she said that of the last 75 semi-privatized projects since the early 2000s, this government spent \$8 billion more than they needed to—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: She got it wrong.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, she got it wrong. The Auditor General is wrong.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Yes, on this one she is wrong.

Ms. Catherine Fife: She did a forensic audit of Infrastructure Ontario, who could not even defend themselves. They came to committee and they had no answers for us.

You have Ed Clark, who is in charge. He's working in a little office outside of the Premier's office. There's a little green curtain, and there are some levers in there, and he's there. Then you—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the Minister of Transportation to cut back a little bit on his comments. The cross-dialogue is not acceptable. It goes through the Chair. Thank you.

Continue.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much.

Then you have Bert Clark, his son, who is in charge of Infrastructure Ontario, who came to our committee and could not, with any veracity, challenge the Auditor General.

I'm telling you, for us, this is the missing piece of the PC motion: In order to ensure that we have that funding for health care, for education and for those social programs, we need transformative change in the way that the finances of the finance ministry are allocated. We need the Treasury Board to do their due diligence in ensuring that those contracts—we need to set the bar high for those contracts, because if you set that bar high enough, those contracts wouldn't go out to the private sector, because the private sector is interested in making money. They are not interested in delivering the services. That's what we found with the road maintenance contracts. Every time those trucks go out to do the job that they were hired to do, they lose money. So there is a direct correlation to the way this government has embraced privatization of public services. It is more costly, based on the Auditor General's report—not on our reports, not on our internal investigation. The Auditor General of this province is an independent officer of the Legislature. She is non-partisan. She came forward with this report. You need the money. You should be looking for money any place that you can find it. It's independent intelligence outside of this place which is predominant.

When the Auditor General sharply criticized Infrastructure Ontario, specifically Ontario's use of public-private partnerships for infrastructure, it was a key finding. In the last nine years, Ontarians have spent \$8 billion more on IO's AFP model than if conventional public financing had been used.

Why would a government that can borrow money at 2.9% borrow it at anywhere between 9% and 28%? Why? For the love of humanity, somebody on that side of the House has to ask the question. There has to be a way.

The Premier says, "I have to sell Hydro One. We have to have Infrastructure Ontario and borrow money to the tune of \$5.7 billion," according to the Auditor General's report, but yet there's a conflict here. It is a contradiction. There's a walking contradiction, and it's on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at the public accounts—because this is the key part about this place. You can have the ribbon

cuttings and you can have the press releases and you can put out the media releases and you can say whatever you want. But if you follow the money in this place, and if you look at public accounts, this is really interesting. Based on the last public accounts annual report, you will notice that 10 years ago the government tended to overspend its budget on infrastructure: a \$4-billion overage in 2007-08, presumably due to the sudden need for stimulus. They're still talking about that recession. They're going to spin us so far that we're going to end up in another recession if we're not careful.

1700

But that pattern has reversed under this Premier. Now the government routinely—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Listen to this. I know you're fascinated by it.

Now the government routinely underspends its infrastructure budget by billions. I wish the minister was here.

In both 2013-14 and 2014-15, the government cites lower-than-forecasted construction activity. You seem unable to spend the infrastructure dollars that were already available, despite saying to us in great desperation that you must sell Hydro One for infrastructure instead of taking this mandate to the people of this province. You're not even spending the money that you already allocated in your budget. What's happening here? It poses a real question, Mr. Speaker.

We went across the province. We had some really creative feedback from people: from students, from administrators in public organizations, from the private sector. Invest Ottawa came forward with an idea that said, "Pull some of that private sector money in for venture capital. Give them a tax credit and pull some of the private sector money in." That's a brilliant idea.

Government cannot do everything—I almost said "anything" because that's really what I'm feeling. Government cannot do everything, but government has a key role. Government has a key role in creating the confidence for investment. What we have here in the province of Ontario is an incredible crisis of confidence.

It's the way you distribute the funding. The Auditor General found that 80% of the money from the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund, from the RED fund and from the other pots of money was done behind closed doors. That's a real problem.

You know what that says to a young company that's thinking about coming into Ontario? It says that if they're not in the Liberals' pockets, they're not going to get the money. That is a crisis of confidence: 80% of the money—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Oh, that's not fair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member will withdraw that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I withdraw.

The Auditor General found that 80% of those funds were distributed to two companies without a public process. That does not instill confidence for the people of this province.

We look forward to this budget. We're going to have some fun with this budget tomorrow, but I tell you one thing: What you've done by introducing this budget in the manner that you have is that you've only added to the cynicism of this democracy in this province, ignoring those voices—we are still writing the report. The finance critic from the PC Party and myself are part of the committee that is still writing the report. It has never happened in the history of this province that a finance report has not been delivered to the finance minister before he or she delivers the budget. It has never happened.

What that tells us and what that tells the people of this province is that you have truly just thrown up your hands and said, "We are just going to do whatever we want and we don't care what the people of this province think. We don't care what they've said, and we're going to do what we want, what Liberals want." But that is not in the best interest of the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's a pleasure to join the debate.

You know, it was wonderful. Just about an hour or two ago, I had a chance to meet with all the wonderful young people who are here today as part of the youth Parliament. They asked a series of wonderful questions.

As I stand here and think about what we've heard here today and the meetings that I've had with them, it reminds me why I'm here. I'm here to improve the quality of life for the people in my community, the people of Ontario and, really, to think about making the kinds of investments, making the kinds of decisions that are going to serve these people well in generations to come.

This government has credible plans to do those things, has a credible plan to manage our money wisely and has a credible plan to balance the budget. What's incredible to me is this motion and the lack of credibility in the arguments put forward by the opposition.

When this government came to office in 2003, we had blackouts, which were left to us by the Conservative government. We were left with unsustainable funding of hydro rates by the taxpayer. Now, the PC Party is promising that they have a plan, yet they have no plan. They haven't come forward with a plan.

Our government has a plan, and it's a credible plan. There's a range of things being done. I don't have time in my two minutes to speak to them all, but a tremendous number of steps have been taken to keep rates low; a tremendous number of steps are being taken to make sure Hydro One is operating more efficiently and in the interests of the people of Ontario. The kinds of steps that this government is taking—we're doing everything and we're doing it credibly to keep rates low, and we'll continue to do that.

The folks across keep talking about health care and cuts. The reality is that this government has been more committed than any government across the aisle to investing in health care. We continue to invest in health care and we continue to invest in hospitals, in doctors, in nurses, in personal support workers, in community care.

The member from Nipissing's party, when they were in office—they have no credibility when it comes to this issue. They closed 28 hospitals. They fired 4,000 nurses. They are the party that campaigned on—wait for it—firing 100,000 public sector workers, of which many thousands would have been in communities across the province delivering the health care that we are here investing in and delivering on. We have a plan; the folks across did not have a plan.

Lastly, I came to office after serving in the private sector. I have the fortune of working with Minister Deb Matthews and members of the Treasury Board to help ensure that we're getting value for taxpayers' dollars and that we balance the budget by 2017-18. We're not doing it like governments of the past have done it, like the PC Harris government did, like the PC caucus campaigned on doing by firing 100,000 people. We're doing it in a responsible way.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Are we finished yelling? Good. If somebody wants to yell, they might want to get in their seat. Then I can identify them properly.

Continue.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Speaker.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: The truth hurts.

Mr. Yvan Baker: The truth hurts, exactly.

We've committed to balancing the budget. We have a credible plan to do so. We're doing it in a responsible way. Under the leadership of the President of the Treasury Board and the team at Treasury Board, this entire caucus and cabinet are working to go program by program, line by line through the budget to deliver better outcomes, better value for money, better bang for the buck and, in so doing, making sure we're delivering better outcomes in health care, in energy, in education across government, but also working towards a balanced budget.

The member opposite talks a lot about credibility in his motion. He often refers to the FAO. Let me quote from the FAO's report—this one, which the member keeps referring to. It says here, "The province would appear to be on track to beat its 2015-16 deficit target of \$8.5 billion." That's credibility. The arguments from across are not credible.

Speaker, this is a government that has a plan on health care, is investing in health care. This is a government that has a plan on hydro and is working hard to keep rates down. Is there more work to do? You bet there's a lot of work to do, but we've got a credible plan. This is a government that's responsibly working to make sure we deliver value for taxpayers' dollars. We're going to deliver a balanced budget in 2017-18.

This is the plan that the people of Ontario deserve, the people of Etobicoke Centre deserve and the young people in this gallery deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Elgin—Middlesex—London.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Elgin—Middlesex—London. Sorry.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Speaker. I know the two of us look alike from a distance, and we sit so far from each other.

I'm just going to speak for a few minutes and discuss a little bit our second ask, which is to properly manage Ontario's health care system.

It's interesting to note that the members on the government side keep referencing governments and how they managed certain sectors. But I think the people of Ontario today are sick of the deflection dealing with the past. They would like them to take responsibility for what's occurring currently. I'll just tell you what happened in the last year alone with regard to health care in our province.

1710

First of all, the government started off by cutting \$54 million from the health care budget, even though the federal transfer went up 6% last year. This government cut \$815 million from doctor services without even negotiating with the doctors. They walked away from the table and then cut \$815 million. This government cut 50 residency positions for our doctors in this province. I can tell you, coming from rural Ontario—and I know the northern members here—we don't have enough doctors to fill the spaces that are needed. And what do they do? They cut the residency positions.

Mr. Speaker, there was an interesting survey taking place when the government cut doctor services—\$815 million. Prior to that announcement, they surveyed the residents in the school systems and the students: "Are you planning to set up shop in Ontario after you graduate and get your medical licence?" Eighty-nine per cent said, "Yes, no problem." After this government cut \$815 million from doctor services, the results are that 30% are going to stay in Ontario.

We've seen this shortage before, precipitated by mistakes made by previous governments. We're still paying for it today. We're starting to see enough doctors in the system, but this government has taken a backwards stance. We've also seen this past year—the fourth consecutive year—hospital budgets have been frozen, which is resulting in numerous nursing positions, over 300 in Nipissing alone, being cut from the system.

You ask, "Why? Why are they doing these cuts?" It's not because the money isn't there; it's the mismanagement of the money. The Auditor General reported herself that 40% of the dollars that go into the CCAC sticks with administration and doesn't go to front-line health care. It doesn't go to the home care system. So this government is paying for and creating more bureaucracy, cutting front-line health care professionals and freezing hospital budgets, resulting in cuts to the nursing profession. All we're asking is to have some sort of management plan for our health care sector in the budget tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: As I rise today to discuss the priorities of the 2016 budget, there are some realities that

exist in my riding in Niagara and across the province that need to be recognized by this government.

The first thing everyone needs to know is that, for most people in this province, life is getting harder. It's getting harder for families, it's getting harder for seniors, and, quite frankly, it's getting harder for young people in the province of Ontario. Their hydro rates are climbing. They can't get decent medical care; it's becoming harder to find. For years now, people have begged this government to help them find jobs.

I met with the people of the Niagara Falls riding. They're good people. They work hard. I don't think they should need to ask for these things. I believe they're entitled—they're entitled—to decent medical care, affordable hydro and good-paying jobs. The people of Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake know they're not the only ones struggling to get by.

It breaks my heart when I talk to seniors in my riding about the challenges they're facing today, after dedicating their entire lives to the riding and to building this province and this country. Increased hydro rates on fixed income—you know what that would be like? They've got to make a decision whether they can even afford to stay in their own homes after they've worked their entire lives. They can't get doctors and nurses. They can't see their doctors on a regular basis. And what's interesting about that is, as a province, we're fighting with our doctors, yet we have no problem giving CEOs for hydro \$435 million. It makes no sense to me.

The cost of food is rising. Some of that is because of the dollar. Do you know what that does for seniors? It means more seniors have to go to food banks. The cost of medication is increasing. Seniors are being forced to choose between food and medicine. Affordable housing—I have no doubt that my fellow members in this House are hearing the same concerns. They have all heard from the constituents in their own ridings about the problems they face. Knowing that fact only makes it more disappointing that the Liberal government refuses to listen to the people of the province of Ontario.

Of course, we're told that they had consultations across the province. We are told that hundreds of witnesses appeared before them, and that their advice was taken seriously. Mr. Speaker, I worry that this may not be the case. Let me read to you from the *Toronto Star*, of all places:

"This time, with the budget being released far earlier than in previous years, the Liberal government's pretence of consultation looks....

"Factor in the reality ... that key decisions are made well in advance, and it becomes clear the budget was locked up weeks ago—at the precise time the government claimed to be taking the public" seriously.

The people of my community and the province came out to the consultations because they wanted to make a difference. They wanted the results—so that their voices would be heard clearly in the process. "Do we want to stop the sell-off of Hydro One," they were asked. "Do we want to have action being taken to make sure life is more

affordable for seniors, and that our kids have post-secondary educations they can afford, so that they don't come out with a mortgage when they're done?"

Mr. Speaker, I worry that this budget will show that the concerns of the people of the province of Ontario are not being heard. While we sit here and debate the upcoming budget, it is equally unclear what kinds of cuts the official opposition has in mind to balance the budget.

The Ontario NDP knows that the people of Ontario cannot afford another round of Harper/Harris-style cuts simply to make the accountants happy. The people of the province face long-term challenges that require bold solutions—solutions that do not include the cancellation of major infrastructure projects or reckless, no-strings-attached corporate tax cuts. They need a plan that makes life easier for everyday Ontarians, not the richest of the rich.

Look at the people of Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie, who have all but lost access to their medical care. They can't afford any more health care cuts from either the Liberal government or the official opposition. They believe that as Canadians and residents of this province, they have a right to decent health care. I agree with them, and I think we all should.

This government, of course, will claim that they are increasing spending on health care, but we all know different. We've seen the Liberal government putting more and more money in the hands of private health care. I'm going to give you an example—it was touched on by the Conservatives: a company like CarePartners. The Liberal government gives LHINs the money, they then give it to the CCAC, and they then give it to CarePartners. And do you know what happens? It doesn't get to the front-line workers. That's the problem. That's why you've got to stop the privatization of health care. You're spending more and more money on CEO salaries and not putting money back into front-line health care where it belongs.

How can we claim to be spending more when 1,200 nurses have lost their jobs under the Liberals? Ontario—

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: This is important. I know you're all talking, but I'd like you to listen to this.

Ontario has 2.3 hospital beds per 1,000 people. That's what we have today, compared to the national average, which is 3.5 per 1,000.

Go ask the people of Fort Erie if this Liberal government has increased front-line health care services. I don't think you'll like the answer. It's downright shameful.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to take a moment to look at the official opposition's record on privatization and Hydro. These days, they talk a good game about the sale of Hydro One and wanting to keep our utilities public. They seem to like the message of the NDP; they're starting to run on it too. But yet again, the record is a little different from what is being said. This is important. We are the only party that has been fully and vocally opposed to the sale of Hydro, in whole or in part—

Ms. Laurie Scott: That's not true.

1720

Mr. Wayne Gates: Absolutely it's true—of our public assets from day one. We don't want to sell 60%; we don't want to sell 49%; we don't want to sell 1% of Hydro. The Ontario NDP is the only party that has travelled right across the province hosting town hall meetings, including in my riding of Niagara Falls, to make sure the people of Ontario, in all parts of Ontario, have their voices heard on this incredibly important issue.

Think about this: Now nearly 200 municipalities—of which I was one; I was a city councillor—including all three in my riding, have said no to the sale of Hydro. What's interesting, when I hear about how the Liberal government likes to listen to the province of Ontario and the people in this great province, is that 85%—it's a lot higher than my math mark was in high school—of the residents of this province agree not to sell Hydro.

The people of this province understand that it doesn't make sense to sell, in whole or in part, a company that brings in \$700 million per year in profit. They understand that by losing that profit, we lose money for education, we lose money for hospitals and we lose money for infrastructure. And not just once: year after year after year. These reckless plans of cuts and privatization do not serve the best interests of the people in my riding or in the province.

Let me tell you a little bit about my priorities. I don't have a lot of time so I'm going to skip. In fact, I've got a project just like that in my riding that is waiting and waiting for the Liberal government: to expand the GO train all the way to Niagara Falls. The entire region has come together and given a solid business plan to the province which shows that bringing the GO train to Niagara Falls would bring—listen to this, because I know my good friend Mr. Bradley will like to hear this—\$195 million in economic benefit, 2,400 permanent jobs, 1,200 full time construction jobs, and remove thousands of cars off the QE each day.

Mr. Speaker, people in the province don't want cuts and they don't want to see our assets privatized to help the richest of the rich. They want jobs, decent health care and the bills they can afford. Take a look at the people in Fort Erie. I only have a few seconds left. On their hydro bills, their grocery bills—they even lost their hospital. What we need is those slots returned to Fort Erie to put jobs in our community.

Thank you very much. I appreciate the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Granville Anderson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to welcome Tenzin Shomar and Megan Chassels from Durham. They're here for the model Parliament.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We'll allow that. It's not really a point of order, but we'll allow that. Further debate.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'd like to approach this resolution, or opposition resolution, as we put it, with a little different approach because I recognize that when

you're in opposition, your job is to be negative about whatever the government is doing. I hope I wasn't that way when I was in opposition. The member for West Lincoln would know I was very positive about anything the government did that was good on this side. I just couldn't think of anything when the time came up.

I'm going to make this prediction: When we're all phoned by our local radio station or newspapers, we will say good things about the budget and the opposition will say negative things. That's my prediction.

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know that's hard to predict, except I want to say one—I want to compliment the member from Niagara Falls in this regard.

On my local radio station, last budget, the round table was busy dumping on the Ontario government, as they do, talking about how there's nothing in the budget for Niagara. Here's an opposition member, who is going to find some things in the budget he disagrees with, who had to remind them—because none of them seemed to know this at the round table—that in fact \$10 million was going to the Goodman School of Business at Brock University. I want to commend the member for that. Not many people would do that, would try to correct that. Even though he had other legitimate criticisms of the budget, I want to give him credit for that that day. It really took an opposition member to do that.

The approach we're taking, what we've heard—and you see it in question period. This reminds me of the old Canadian Tire commercial, where they said they wanted to spend like Santa and save like Scrooge. Well, the first half of question period—today it was only the first few questions—was about saving. The Conservative members get up in the Legislature and say, "You've got to address the budget; you've got to cut spending; you have to get your spending under control." And then, of course, they get into other questions where they want to spend money—a total inconsistency taking place.

Now, back in the days when the member for West Lincoln, the member who represents Glanbrook and Niagara West, was leader, there was consistency. I knew where he stood. I may not have agreed with the policies he brought forward, but he was very principled in his approach and he was very consistent in his approach. Now, if I want to be flippant, I would say consistently wrong, but I won't say that, because he actually believed it, and his party believed, in those days. So you knew where he stood.

Let me tell you another thing he did—two things I thought were rather courageous and consistent. We had a budget, a couple of budgets ago, where he was calling for some significant cuts in government spending, as the party wanted. They asked him, "What about West Lincoln hospital in your riding?" Instead of saying, "Well, you've got to accept that," he was consistent and said, "No, I have to be consistent and I accept that." He's a good supporter of West Lincoln Memorial Hospital. Subsequent to that, in a future budget, he went to bat for it. But that was an example of consistency.

The other thing was, during the election campaign, his party, despite a lot of pressure in the Niagara region, said no to GO Transit to Niagara until the budget was balanced. That was their position, and my friend from Niagara Falls will remind me that Bart Maves, the former member and the Conservative candidate, said that in the all-candidates meeting, that there would be no GO Transit to Niagara at that time. That's hard to say, because, again, a lot of people were clamouring for it at that time.

Today, the present leader, I think the last person he meets with is the person he agrees with, because he agrees with everybody now. Even what they use to refer to as the "union bosses"—he's now courting those people who his party used to, and certainly his Prime Minister used to, refer to as "union bosses."

I was pleased today that the member for Nepean got a question. I want to say that. She had been shut out. The questions are good; they grate me sometimes, but I like to see her have a question. Somebody finally let her on the list.

Look, it's very difficult. I meet with people from various agencies—by the way, I want to say another thing. I was sitting with the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook at another meeting—I won't get into the details because it was confidential—with a local stakeholder group. The thing he could have said—I'm sitting there as a government member—he could have dumped all over the government and said, "I disagree with whatever they wanted." Instead, he asked significant questions at the time. He wasn't negative towards them, but he asked significant questions. That doesn't happen that often, and, again, I admired the stance he had taken.

I'm not doing this to be mischievous—part of it is, of course. I'm not doing it to be mischievous; I'm doing it because I admired the consistency. Now, the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook would say, "Where were you when I needed you expressing these views?" As Premier Davis says from time to time, "Where were those views?"

By the way, mentioning Premier Davis, under his government, my recollection is that there was never a balanced budget under that Progressive Conservative government for 15 years—no balanced budgets. Back when I was elected, we were the small-c conservatives, asking, "When are you going to balance that budget?" Now, things have changed. It depends on where you sit in the House.

On hydro, the member from Niagara Falls is right: The only thing these people dispute over there, despite what they're saying—they think we should sell all of hydro, secretly, in their heart of hearts. They think we should sell all of hydro, and the government simply wants, as the member for Kitchener—Waterloo said, to broaden the ownership. She understood that.

1730

I'm just looking for some consistency. They closed 28 hospitals when they were in power. That's what they did because they wanted to make a transformation within the

health care system, and there were a number of nurses who lost their jobs and so on.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It was so quiet in here a few minutes ago, and now it has escalated, to say the least. There seem to be people who aren't in their seats who are talking. So maybe we'll cut that back and we'll sit in our seats, and the minister will continue with his expert cross-examination.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much.

When I meet with stakeholders, I ask them this question because they put forward a good case for more expenditures in their area. I ask at the end of the meeting—I never get the answer I want to hear, but I ask at the end of the meeting, "If we are to do everything you would like, are you prepared to campaign for a tax increase?" "Oh, no, no. Go and take it from education, take it from health care, take it from a thousand other places." Because when you make those promises, when you talk about wanting to enhance services to a great extent, it costs money. Either you run a deficit, and you're critical of that; you raise taxes, and you'll be critical of that; or you don't do it, and you're critical of that. That is the job of the opposition: to be critical.

I want to save some time for my other members. I can just see the dirty looks coming at me now for taking as long as I did.

But the last thing I want to say is this—with your permission, using a prop. It says this. It says, "Bats all folks." It is reputed that one baseball player would like to get paid \$30 million a year. I just want to put this to the House: That would be twice as much as all members of the Ontario Legislature put together, reminding, as you want me to, that we're in a seven-year pay freeze at this time. I just wanted to put that on the record before I yielded the floor to my good friends on the other side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Members will know that I spent a better part of January and half of February involved with a successful campaign.

Interjection: Yes, he did.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you. But it was met with three basic themes at the doors. Some of you would have heard that. I know you were campaigning in Whitby—Oshawa. The hydro system is out of touch with the reality of homeowners and businesses; there's an underfunded health care system that now lacks the basic support to provide first-class health care treatment to residents; and a budget imbalance that makes our province one of the highest subnational debtors in North America.

Now, since arriving at Queen's Park, I continue to hear the same concerns from constituents in Whitby—Oshawa. What they're telling me is that families are hurting and are asking for help, and it's not limited to my riding alone. This is such a consistent and universal call to action. Whether it be Sault Ste. Marie, Leeds—Grenville and points in between, families are looking for help, but the Liberal government's not listening, are they? They're not listening.

Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberals, our party has listened to the voters of Ontario across the width and breadth of the province. The message we're receiving is very clear, some of which we've heard here in the chamber thus far. Significant change must come now or our province will continue to drift aimlessly over a financial course of ruin.

We need affordable and sustainable energy in this province. That's a simple fact. Hydro in Ontario is one of the most expensive on this continent. Many of my constituents receive their hydro bills, open them cautiously and then creatively calculate a way to pay them and still be in a position to feed their families. That's across all sectors of the Whitby–Oshawa riding. It has become a migraine pain without medical relief.

What's clear is that there's no sound Liberal strategy to lower rates to help Ontarians.

As well, as we go forward, the budget must have a plan to manage Ontario's health care. There are growing health care deficiencies in Ontario, and the system needs real attention.

Earlier this week, I referenced the layoffs at Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences, but this is merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg, in Whitby, Oshawa and elsewhere in the province. We cannot afford to have Ontarians scrambling for health care at an especially vulnerable time in their lives. Liberal mismanagement has left the delivery of health care in a very precarious state in our province.

The voters in Whitby–Oshawa were very clear on election night, weren't they?

Mr. Todd Smith: They certainly were.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Very clear. They demanded real change, and I intend to continue advocating on their behalf until we have a health care system in place that not only meets their expectations but exceeds them.

Finally, we need a plan to balance our budget and to reduce our provincial debt. Without a sound fiscal plan, this government will continue to cut funding to doctors, shut our schools, and continue a pattern of reckless behaviour that includes the share sale of Hydro One.

We speak about returning this province to a place of economic dominance, but it will not happen unless it becomes a place where businesses want to invest and people want to raise their families. We must look to the financial health of Ontario. We must focus on the sound fiscal management of this province and not wait for the imaginary notion that improved provincial monetary health will let us deal with the debt.

I believe that the choices that we make now are at the centre of Ontario's future success and Ontario's resurgence as an economic powerhouse in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I do want to say at the outset that if you saw a look of disappointment on me a little while ago, it was only because I realized I was going to be unable to use the lines that I had stolen from the minister without portfolio, and that he would be a very hard act to

follow. But I respect where I am in the order of precedence.

I'd like to welcome the member from Whitby–Oshawa and address one of the things he said a little earlier on. I had the opportunity, I would like to say, to be in a radio interview with the member from Nipissing, and we agreed on some things and we disagreed on some things. When I look at this motion, there's something that we actually agree on, but I'll get to that in a little while.

We all know that government is about choices. If we want to go back to choices, we'll want to take a look at some choices that were made. In 2009, this government had a choice. We had a financial crisis. We had the auto industry with 400,000 related jobs, families. They needed support. This government, and the federal government as well, made a choice to invest in that auto industry. You'll hear, as you heard from the member from—well, you heard, earlier on, one of my colleagues say, "We're the only subnational with five major auto makers," and that's where we are right now. We made that choice. On the other side, the choice was made to say, "We're not going to support that." I don't think it was the right choice, but I respect that choice. It's all about choices.

Hydro: Unlocking the equity in hydro is a choice. I can understand the members directly opposite from me, because they've been very clear about where they stood from the beginning. I may not agree with them, but I respect their choice.

I know that the members of the other side now have the same position, but not too long ago you had a stronger position than we had. To what the minister without portfolio was saying, it's like, "Okay, we've got some vacillating going on here. Is it going to go this way and then back this way?" It's about a choice. You can't choose everything, and as the minister without portfolio said, you can't say, "Pay down the debt, and you know that new hospital in my riding, and, oh, by the way, we have the highest-paid doctors in Canada and we want you to give them more money, but at the same time, do this." That's not a choice. Sometimes over here we have discussions, to say, "If they can only bring that money tree in the west lobby over here to the east lobby, everything would be great." Respect choices, right?

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Governments of different stripes have all made choices and decisions—I said this last week—about how we were going to make health care sustainable. We've all made difficult choices that have affected people, practitioners, patient care—I could list them right now. We all know that.

One of the things that is a little hard to take is when there's motive ascribed to those changes that we have to make. Now, we're all trying to make this system sustainable and we're working with a finite pool of money. We all know that. You know that, we know that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: So don't waste any of it.

Mr. John Fraser: What I'm saying is, don't spend your time saying, "There isn't a finite pool of money. Do all these things that we want you to do." It does not work

that way. It doesn't work that way, and I know how opposition works. I was on the other side. I respect that you're advocating for communities, and you need to do that, but you can't have it both ways. As the Minister without portfolio said, he respects the choices made by the member from Niagara—Glanbrook because he spoke—

Mr. Randy Hillier: You were never on this side.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: You were never in opposition.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It appears that you've got people on your side, while you are talking, yelling and yelling at you that you weren't on that side. Okay. I heard that. And then I've got people over here cross-dialoguing with the speaker: the member from Lanark. I would suggest that we cut it back a bit. It's bad enough on opposition day, but when even the government starts talking loudly when their own speaker is talking, that's embarrassing. So can we please cut it back? Thank you.

Mr. John Fraser: I'll turn down the volume a little bit and get a little less exercised.

I wanted to say that I think that the choices that are presented in this motion are false. They're false choices. You know they're false choices, I know they're false choices. You know it's all politics. But I do agree on one thing. Here's the one thing I agree with the member from Nipissing on, and this is what it is: There is a credible plan to balance the budget. We've had one. There will be one tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As I am fond of saying, it's always a pleasure—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock. I can't even hear him.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'll talk louder.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): No, no, you were good.

I can't even hear him. That's amazing. It's your guy, and over here, it's fairly loud too, and you haven't even voted yet. Please cut it back. I'd like to hear what the Minister of Transportation has to say. Thank you.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I suspect it's going to sound eerily familiar to many in this House, because this is my first opportunity to be here in 2016, to have the chance to add my voice to this debate.

I would have thought, Speaker, given that we were away from this Legislature, in each of our ridings, over the later part of last year and the earlier part of this year, that that would have presented the member from Nipissing and the leader of the official opposition and, frankly, even members of the third party with the opportunity to hear very directly from their constituents about the importance of making sure that we do continue to build the province up, that we do continue to move the province forward.

When I look at the particular opposition day motion that we're discussing or debating here this afternoon, in a

couple of occasions I can see here, it talks about the importance of a credible plan. The member from Ottawa South just referenced the fact that this government, this Premier, very clearly has a credible plan for doing exactly that—moving the province forward and building it up.

What I find remarkable is that it almost seems like we're in some sort of repeat mode here in 2016, which is a little bit disappointing, given that over the last three years, in my time here in this Legislature as an MPP from Vaughan, it's disappointing to understand that members of the official opposition—

Mr. Randy Hillier: It is disappointing. Your time here has been disappointing.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Like the member who is speaking right now from Lanark—I forget the—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Oh, come on. It's not that hard.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, who's speaking out right now. I agree with that member, surprisingly. It is disappointing. It's disappointing in his case that over the last couple of months he hasn't been able to convince his colleagues that the right thing to do for the people he represents is to invest in infrastructure, invest in health care and build the province up, which is exactly the credible plan that this Premier, this government and this finance minister are moving forward with.

The one thing that we hear over and over again—the Premier alluded to this in question period earlier today—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Lanark.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: The leader of the official opposition, the member from Nipissing, members of that entire caucus, on the one hand, will spend a great deal of time and energy talking about their suggestions for how we might want to slash and burn core public services, which they did when they were last in power. Let me assure you that the people of Vaughan and the people in 447 communities across this province have not forgotten the shameful record of that government, that party, when they were last in power.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Downloaded.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: When you think of how much they downloaded to our communities, when you think of how many infrastructure transit projects they not only didn't build, but that they killed, when you think of how they filled in subways that were under construction in the city of Toronto, in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, when you think of how our public education system and our public health care system were in chaos when they were last in power, and when you also—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock. You got the big guy to naming, almost. I've been more than tolerant, more than reasonable. For the next person who speaks out, it's going to be the final warning,

and you certainly don't want to miss the vote. So, silenzio.

Continue.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Speaker, your Italian sounds better than mine. I appreciate that intervention.

I look back at the motion and I see "a plan to properly manage Ontario's health care system." Again, in that very dark period when the official opposition, the Conservative opposition, was in power, hospitals closed.

With a degree of audacity, there's even a reference to the notion of hiring more nurses here in this opposition day motion. I believe nurses were once referenced by the former Conservative Premier—they were compared to hula hoops. That goes right to the heart of exactly what we're dealing with here. It's a Conservative opposition that is so desperate to run away from its unfortunate and discouraging history as a government in this province that they will do anything.

The good news for all of us, Speaker, is that the people of Nipissing, the people of Simcoe and the people of Ontario will not be fooled again. Whether we're talking about the sale of the 407, we're talking about the under-investments in critical infrastructure right across this province, or the under-investing, the slashing and burning and the chaos left in our public education and health care systems, the people of Ontario won't be fooled.

Speaker, there's also a reference in here to "a credible plan to balance the budget." I'm blessed with a good memory and I can still remember the front page of a major Toronto daily shortly after the Liberal government came back to power in 2003. Excuse me: They outright misrepresented the truth, Speaker, a \$6-billion—

Interjections.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): No, you'll sit down first, then you'll stand up and withdraw.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Sit down again.

Continue.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much, Speaker. Suffice it to say, though I was happy to withdraw that comment, the Conservative Party, the Conservative government, when last in power, left the people of Ontario with a \$6-billion deficit that they never talked about.

When I look up and down this motion, it's unfortunate that even though we are here in 2016, even though everyone on this side of the House, and people right across this province, I would think, would want to believe that this is a Conservative opposition that has learned its lesson, that is looking forward to partnering with us to move the province and move it forward—it's unfortunate that it's the same old same old from that opposition, Speaker.

Most importantly, what's most shocking to me as an MPP representing a fast-growing community in York region like Vaughan and as Ontario's Minister of Transportation is that time and time again, whether it's the leader of the official opposition or it's the leader of

the Ontario NDP, when asked repeatedly to put a plan forward for how they would build up this province, for how they would build infrastructure, for how they would build four-lane highways in northern Ontario or turn GO into regional express rail or build more crucial infrastructure for a stronger economy and for a stronger quality of life—time and again, the leaders of both opposition parties refused to tell us they have a plan.

Speaker, because they have no plan, it begs the question: From the member from Nipissing who sponsored this motion, from the leader of the Conservative opposition and, frankly, from the leader of the NDP, I just want to hear once and for all, what would they cancel? Would it be GO expansion? Would it be highway construction? Would it be more hospitals? Would it be a better economy? Would it be a better quality of life? Own up to it. Tell us why you won't work with us to build this province up.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, my turn.

Mr. Fedeli has moved opposition day number 1. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1752 to 1802.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The members take their seats, please. Order, please.

Mr. Fedeli has moved opposition day motion number 1.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Amott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Scott, Laurie
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Smith, Todd
Barrett, Toby	MacLaren, Jack	Thompson, Lisa M.
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Walker, Bill
Coe, Lorne	McDonnell, Jim	Wilson, Jim
Fedeli, Victor	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff
Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick	
Hillier, Randy	Pettapiece, Randy	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): All those opposed to the motion, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	McMahon, Eleanor
Anderson, Granville	Fife, Catherine	McMeekin, Ted
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Meilleur, Madeleine
Baker, Yvan	Fraser, John	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Ballard, Chris	Gates, Wayne	Moridi, Reza
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gretzky, Lisa	Murray, Glen R.
Bradley, James J.	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Chan, Michael	Hoggarth, Ann	Oraziotti, David
Chiarelli, Bob	Hoskins, Eric	Potts, Arthur
Colle, Mike	Jaczek, Helena	Qadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Lalonde, Marie-France	Rinaldi, Lou
Crack, Grant	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario

Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dong, Han

MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
McGarry, Kathryn

Singh, Jagmeet
Sousa, Charles
Thibeault, Glenn
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being past 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1805.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 25; the nays are 54.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, William Short

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Brown, Patrick (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cookville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉES PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

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Thursday 25 February 2016

Jeudi 25 février 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller



Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 25 February 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 25 février 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WASTE-FREE ONTARIO ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS DÉCHETS

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 24, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 151, An Act to enact the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016 and the Waste Diversion Transition Act, 2016 and to repeal the Waste Diversion Act, 2002 / Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur la récupération des ressources et l'économie circulaire et la Loi transitoire de 2016 sur le réacheminement des déchets et abrogeant la Loi de 2002 sur le réacheminement des déchets.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When we last debated this bill, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry had the floor, and he has it now.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: When I left off yesterday, we were just talking about the discussion about the carbon tax that's being proposed, and the Premier of Saskatchewan talking about not participating because he's worried about being competitive. I think that was a good message, and it's something that we should be worrying about because we have lost our competitiveness. Of course, this cap-and-trade that we are talking about is not being proposed by our American neighbours. I think an integrated, North American plan would be very important.

To continue, this is not job creation. It's a make-work project. We can become neither prosperous nor waste-free by endlessly splitting our supply-chain links between an increasing number of middlemen. By the same token, we won't achieve proper waste diversion through an endless list of agency creations and appointments.

The Liberals have created a staggering amount of separate entities in the waste diversion industry such as Waste Diversion Ontario, Stewardship Ontario and Ontario Tire Stewardship, just to name a few. If you will allow me a little light-hearted joke, the Liberals have created an alphabet soup of agencies that hinder, rather than promote, recycling. While Ontarians should throw this soup down the drain, the packaging it arrived in

should be recycled into a sustainable, efficient waste diversion policy.

Bill 151 brings the Liberals' waste diversion policy closer to the recycling bin, but we aren't there yet. Conventional wisdom has it that the road to despair is littered with good intentions. Unfortunately for this government, their well-intentioned policy statements may result in higher consumer prices and hardly any impact on the waste diversion rate. Once the consumer has paid, the cost of the recycled material remains the same. This is why the Ontario PC caucus has been a consistent advocate for the government to get off businesses' backs, implement strong measures to make manufacturers responsible for waste diversion and encourage a more efficient recycling market.

Many countries in Europe, for example, have extended producer responsibility, which can work to increase the recycling and waste diversion rate. Countries like Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden have exemplary recycling rates and share a common commitment to extending producer responsibility, a policy that forces the producer to internalize the waste diversion and disposal costs of their product into their own supply chain rather than delegating this to municipalities or other levels of government.

As an example, the Blue Box Program is jointly paid for by municipalities and producers. Blue boxes have been a feature of daily life in many municipalities and are often the single greatest reminder to consumers that recycling is an important component of a sustainable waste management strategy.

Residential recycling programs, however, are but a fraction of the commitment to reducing pressure on our landfills. According to Statistics Canada, less than 40% of Ontario's waste came from residential sources, with the balance coming from construction, commercial, industrial and institutional sources. We consider the Blue Box Program and other consumer recycling initiatives an investment in building a strong attitude toward waste reduction and recycling in our population. But they don't, just by themselves, bring us to any waste reduction and diversion target that we may set for the province.

Even in examining international waste diversion statistics, we have to pay attention to whether the waste referred to is municipal solid waste or overall waste generated within the country. Peaks of 60% diversion can quickly be reduced to 50%.

While an unquestionably admirable result by general Canadian and Ontario standards, there is clearly a lot more work to be done. Ontario's waste diversion market

has the potential to grow. As I said previously, only 25% of Ontario's waste is diverted, according to the Ontario Waste Management Association.

My own riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry boasts several waste diversion and waste management companies that have faced, and are facing, significant regulatory hurdles in trying to expand their operations to cater to increasing market share. One recycling company in my riding is at risk of closing down because of the delays in securing regulatory permission to expand their operation and bring in new and better equipment. Many companies operating in Ontario are based outside the province and have to look after their bottom line. If a facility can't provide the service, the supply chain moves elsewhere.

In a tour I had of one plant, they were being held up on a permit, trying to install a shredder. Shredders are not that rare a piece of machinery in Ontario. Because it was put into a line where they were shredding plastics, they have been waiting months for approval from the Ministry of the Environment. First of all, you have to wonder why a permit is required. But even when one is, why is it sitting on a desk somewhere for something as relatively simple as shredding plastic?

In another case, a landfill provider in my riding has been waiting three months for an allocated time frame for a minister's approval on the terms of reference for a necessary expansion.

These businesses cannot borrow with abandon, as the province of Ontario can. They have to pay their suppliers, their hydro bills, their property taxes and their workers at regular intervals. In order to do so, they have to be able to work. It's the government's obsession with red tape that is driving the recycling and waste disposal business into the ground.

A South Glengarry township project to extend the landfill site started out as a \$500,000 project in my time as mayor. It took 10 years and \$5 million under this government—it was \$4.5 million, money that we could have put into roads and bridges wasted on consultant reports and time delays.

The impact of these delays can be felt far beyond local borders. Waste that could have been diverted to local plants has been transported further away—sometimes out of the country altogether—for processing. This adds both a monetary cost to waste diversion and an environmental one, since transporting every tonne of waste releases CO₂ and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. This runs completely contrary to the stated objective of reducing waste and emissions.

This isn't the government's first attempt at reforming the provincial waste management and diversion framework. An earlier bill, delivered without consultation with key stakeholders, was thankfully allowed to wither and was extinguished when the election was called in 2014. Since then, the government has incorporated several PC policy proposals into what is now Bill 151. I will join my colleagues in saying there is no monopoly on a good idea. We want Ontario to have the most efficient recyc-

ling and waste diversion market that our producers and consumers can deliver. In order to do that, we need the government and its agencies to get out of the way.

0910

The current incarnation of the waste diversion framework for Ontario is still too dependent on central direction from Toronto and over-managed by government and quasi-government agencies. What they must realize is that they don't have to claim credit for everything. Good governance is often the art of quietly letting people go about their daily business without interference, as long as the basic rules are respected.

We don't need the Liberals' numerous environmental agencies, such as Waste Diversion Ontario and Stewardship Ontario, whose duties and remit overlap so tightly with the relevant ministries that it's difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. There is a strong economic argument for a centralized clearing house for extended producer responsibility costs. One blue box is much easier to administer than a box for each producer in every household. Yet it doesn't necessarily have to be a government agency or something established or administered at arm's length by the government.

Speaker, I have more to say on this, but it just goes to say that we have more work to do. We encourage the government. They supported some of our policies and incorporated them. I think we all want to see a waste-free Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the member from Glengarry–Prescott for his contribution to the debate.

He talked about delays in permits and businesses trying to cut through red tape to get things that they need to continue operating. I've met with businesses as well. Sometimes they find it difficult because they aren't consulted when legislation is actually enacted or created. That becomes a hurdle for many businesses. I know that this bill right now really doesn't have a lot to offer, because this government has a vision and they've created that vision in the bill.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Stretch vision.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, stretch vision, stretch goals. It's a lot of regulation that's going to build this bill. I understand that they're going to be consulting with environmental groups, businesses and lobbyists afterward to get their input, so we really don't know right now what the bill is going to look like.

Yes, we agree with the idea and the concept of a waste-free Ontario. We're all here to make sure that we leave this world a better place for the next generation, so we're not arguing that by any means.

It's a good thing that this bill is actually in transition to making it so that the producers are responsible for the waste they create, and not the consumer. That's a good thing. Business needs to also have a role to play in the environment. Making them responsible and a part of this process is the way that they're going to buy into a waste-free Ontario.

I also want to mention, Speaker, that when I do my 20-minute debate in just a few short moments, I'll be talking about some of the incineration pieces that are mentioned in this bill. I hope to get some good feedback from the members.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate on Bill 151. Picking up where I left yesterday about the transition process, I will be talking about that further. First of all, I would like to correct my record for Hansard from yesterday's statement.

Yesterday, on page 8 of the Hansard, I said, "all of the companies." Instead of all the companies, many, many companies will be moving toward that direction. While I was discussing the transition process, I was talking about how the transition process will be based on four principles. I said "huge consultations." No, it's not huge; it will be extensive consultations that will be conducted.

While the transition process will be happening, Bill 151 would set clear goals and responsibilities for the process of the transition. The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change would provide clear direction on how this transition will take place. The new oversight authority, the new Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority, would approve and oversee that implementation of the windup plans to ensure that the minister's direction is followed, and to mitigate the risk of interruption of any services.

Mr. Speaker, if this proposed legislation, Bill 151, is passed, we will be working extensively with all the relevant parties, including the existing industry funding organizations, producers, municipalities and waste management service providers, and the public on how to make this transition as seamless and efficient as possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate today because I have to ask Ontarians: Please be sure that you read this legislation and you read the budget, and you read the information that comes out on cap-and-trade. I implore you: Do your homework. Don't be fooled by this government yet again.

Yesterday, we had the Premier's reference numbers with regard to their cap-and-trade scheme that only apply to the first couple of years. We need long-term goals and long-term costs because our consumers, our Ontarian taxpayers and our businesses need to be able to plan accordingly. Don't be fooled by this government.

In that light, Speaker, I would suggest to you that there was even more spin shared by this government with regard specifically to Bill 151. I've heard the Minister of the Environment time and again saying that the Ontario Tire Stewardship is gone. Well, Speaker, when you read this legislation, there is nothing legislated in terms of a timeline of eradicating the Ontario Tire Stewardship. We have to put an end to wasteful spending, and we just can't trust this government. They spin numbers, they try to fool Ontarians, but again, I want to implore Ontarians:

Do your homework. Understand and drill down to get past the rhetoric so that you can see that this government is trying to do a smoke job on all of us.

But you know what? As opposition, we're here to do our job. I suggest to you that Bill 151 is on the right track, largely because Bill 91 was such a dismal failure they had to embrace many good ideas that we put forward as a PC plan. We intend to continue to try and make Bill 151 better through amendments. Stakeholders are very concerned about some of the issues that we've seen percolate. We look forward to making it better.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. We should get an acronym for that one, right? It's a little bit long. He talked about his time as mayor. Those of us around this chamber who have either been a local or a regional politician before our days here at Queen's Park know of the struggles that our municipalities actually have with landfill sites, waste diversion, consumer complaints about the rising cost of putting out your garbage at the end of the driveway, the endless consultations that have gone on over the years about incineration versus not incineration; that other communities are doing it this way and we should try and move in that direction. It is a struggle, but to be clear, this is only enabling legislation. The proof of how it's going to work will actually be in the pudding.

I've heard the members of the government say there's going to be extensive consultation. I hope that really happens because, as with many pieces of legislation, they pick who they want to actually consult with, and then we all are here with tens or hundreds of groups who said, "I wasn't consulted on this issue at all."

The NDP has long urged for a plan that would actually make producers more responsible for the cost of either the packaging that they produce, or to reduce that packaging. There have been some positive comments from stakeholders, certainly that we've outreached to. One in particular was the Workers Health and Safety Centre, which is hopeful that this bill will actually reduce the hazardous materials that are in the waste stream, but talks about the importance of having to have monitoring and enforcement of that monitoring.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to thank the members from London-Fanshawe, Mississauga-Brampton South, Huron-Bruce and, of course, Welland. A lot of good points were brought up.

0920

I think the member from Huron-Bruce was talking about the previous bill. I remember talking to a multinational representative that had their head office in Toronto. He was talking about their last bill, and he said: "If the government wants us to leave, just tell us, because I'm having a hard time convincing"—it was a large

Japanese electronics firm—"to keep their head office in Toronto. We could just as easily work from New York. This bill is just a nail in the coffin." Of course, the bill was on the table for—it died with the election. But they left, assuming that bill would come through. Those were 100 jobs, good-paying jobs, that we lost out of Toronto.

I talked about our project in South Glengarry, a landfill expansion, which is \$5 million over 10 years. A consultant we hired had just been through one, anticipated to be about \$500,000 in maybe a year. These are existing sites; no complaints from the residents.

One of the common themes—I was down at ROMA this week, and we heard one of the mayors talk about death by 1,000 downloads. That's just what it is. That's \$4.5 million that would have done some major road projects. We're trying to get, in South Glengarry, \$225,000 for a bridge from this government. Of course, there's no money. They've turned down both applications, as were five of the six of my municipalities.

More and more work, but no results. We can't afford, in Ontario, to be wasting. It's scarce capital. It's a resource that we haven't got a lot of, and it is being wasted in red tape from this government. I think the municipalities are getting tired of it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: First, I want to correct my record because I think I made a whole new riding up for the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act. At its core, this bill repeals this government's Waste Diversion Act, passed back in 2002. That bill established our current system of stewardship created in the industry-funded organizations, or IFOs.

The NDP has long called for an end to that model of waste management and has sought to establish greater individual producer responsibility. Waste management is an important issue that affects all of us, regardless of where we live in this province. Take, for example, my hometown of London. We have a large landfill, and the creation of that landfill has created an environment that made it very difficult for the implementation and adoption of recycling programs. Even today, we are struggling to implement the green bin or composting program, because it's easier and cheaper to dump our waste. In London, our rate of kitchen waste composting lags behind other municipalities and even further behind Ontario and the Canadian averages.

In Ontario, 75% of residents compost their biodegradables, including food scraps and yard waste. You may ask, "What's the difference between London and the rest of the province?" The answer is that other municipalities have universal green bins for curbside pickup and London does not, though there is some debate going to be happening on council during the budget deliberations about a green bin proposal, so we're very hopeful. That's a conversation that needs to be had.

The problem lies, as it does for many issues, in the lack of early adoption and investment and tightening of

municipal budgets. London has paid close attention to other municipalities, like Ottawa and Waterloo, that have employed green bin programs in 2010, and the lessons are not particularly easy to watch. Waterloo rolled out a city-wide program, but due to the overestimation of uptake and users, they are paying through the nose for the program.

These are very expensive lessons to learn, and when composting is more expensive than dumping, it is disappointing to know that we are shrugging off our responsibility onto another generation. We know that the costs associated with replacing landfills are exorbitant, and composting is one option where many municipalities are trying to achieve the provincial mandate of reducing their waste streams headed to dumps by 60%. But without proper supports and a provincial partner at the table, these targets are becoming unattainable. Continuing on a path of downloading costs to Ontario municipalities is the wrong approach.

London is struggling under a provincial government that won't commit to help our city's basic transit needs. This is the very same government that watched our unemployment rates soar and our manufacturing collapse, and our ER wait times are some of the worst in the province. Yet this government continues to offload responsibilities to municipalities throughout Ontario. Frankly, London's landfills make it easier to dump recycling and compost, and it makes me concerned for our environment and our future.

Now we have Bill 151 before us, a bill that finally, after more than 10 years, enables a transition to a new regime of individual responsibility for waste and resource recovery. Speaker, it's about time. We're glad that's actually something we are discussing here in this Legislature. We're putting the responsibility back to producers for manufacturing excessive packaging.

In some ways, what this bill attempts to accomplish is long overdue. As New Democrats, we have a long-standing history of seeking greater individual producer responsibility. We have long opposed the current system of industry-funded, privately run stewardship monopolies. But the real change will be, as it always is, in the operationalizing of this bill. Too many times we have seen the kind of legislation that is half measures and tokenistic. Even in this bill, despite my hopes for it to do more, it is so vague on details that it comes across as merely enabling legislation.

As the member mentioned earlier, they are going to do extensive consultation and they are going to be building this bill as it evolves. It's kind of a fluid bill, if you will. I guess that's a good thing, because maybe the end product will actually be what people are telling this government they want out of the legislation so it's workable.

We know that the success of any bill like this comes down to regulation and, more importantly, enforcement. To date, we have not seen any timelines in this bill; nothing changes in the world for those industry-funded monopolies. For all we know, this could be another promise from the government to reduce wait times in hospitals.

Speaker, I say that because, although the government sometimes has these numbers for wait times, constituents constantly call my office about the experiences they are having in hospitals, and they are talking about the wait times for surgery. One example we had in the riding recently was about wait times—or non-existent services—for elective surgeries, for hip and knee. I had a doctor come into my office and he talked about how they have a specific amount of operations or a funding envelope that they have in order to perform hip and knee operations, and when that envelope is gone, they cannot continue to do those surgeries. The doctor said that they actually can do more, but funding isn't there.

So we do need to make sure, when we create these pieces of legislation to implement a waste-free Ontario, that the resources are behind them so they're going to be successful, and enforcement is a piece of that success. Governments like to pretend that they are concerned about it, but in reality either nothing changes or sometimes it even gets worse if the right legislation is not created and crafted.

Despite its title, the Waste-Free Ontario Act, this bill has no legislative goals or targets. Since this government first proposed individual producer responsibility back in 2008, we have seen little to no change. We are not buying the new waste-as-energy mentality. The facts show that municipal waste is non-renewable. It primarily consists of discarded materials such as paper, plastic and glass that are diverted from finite natural resources, such as forests, that are being depleted at unsustainable rates. Burning these materials in order to generate electricity does nothing but create a demand for waste and discourages much-needed efforts to conserve our resources, reduce packaging and encourage recycling and composting. More than 90% of materials currently disposed of in incinerators and landfills can be reused, recycled and composted.

I know that this government will try to tell us that modern incinerators have pollution control devices like filters and scrubbers that make them safe for our communities. The truth is that all incinerators pose considerable risk to the health and environment of neighbouring communities as well as those of the general population. Even the most technologically advanced incinerators release thousands of pollutants that contaminate our air, soil and water. Many of these pollutants enter our food supply and concentrate up through the food chain, not to mention how incinerators affect people who live next to them and those who work with them.

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In newer incinerators, air pollution control devices such as air filters capture and concentrate some of the pollutants, but they don't eliminate them. Let me say that again: Incinerators don't eliminate pollutants; they capture them. This means that those captured pollutants must be transferred somewhere. In many cases, the captured pollutants are transferred to other by-products, such as fly ash, bottom ash, boiler ash and waste water treatment sludge, that are then released into the environment.

Here's the rub, Speaker: Even the most modern pollution control devices, like air filters, do not prevent the escape of many hazardous emissions such as ultra-fine product particles. These ultra-fine particles are produced by the burning of materials that are smaller in size than what is currently regulated and monitored.

Further, incinerators are prone to malfunctions, system failures and breakdowns, which can lead to serious air pollution control problems and increased emissions that are dangerous to public health.

We only need to open a newspaper to read about energy-from-waste incinerator projects right here at home. We read about their delays, breakdowns and conflicting reports on ash and emissions. We need to be very concerned that we have cash-starved our municipalities into begging to implement incinerator programs that will ultimately cause very real damage to those communities and the people living and working there.

The fact is that burning waste contributes to climate change. Incinerators emit more carbon dioxide per unit of electricity than coal-fired plants.

This government is very proud of its record on coal. Back on April 15, 2014, the Minister of Energy announced, "Ontario is now the first jurisdiction in North America to fully eliminate coal as a source of electricity generation," upon closing the Thunder Bay Generating Station, Ontario's last remaining coal-fired plant. They're very proud of that.

According to research by the US EPA, waste-to-energy incinerators and landfills contribute far higher levels of greenhouse gas emissions and overall energy throughout their life cycles than source reduction, reuse and recycling of the very same materials.

I want to take a moment to talk about the opening of the GTA's first new incinerator in decades. Currently, the project is more than a year behind schedule because the new plant has been dealing with repairs and modifications. According to a Toronto Star report back in January 2016, "The \$289-million Durham York Energy Centre in Clarington was expected to be commercially operational and able to process 140,000 tonnes of household garbage annually in December 2014...."

"In late December, Durham officials provided an in camera update to regional council about the results of a 30-day acceptance test that took place in November—the last regulatory hurdle before the plant, managed by the US company Covanta, can be approved and open at full capacity.

"After a complete evaluation of the current information by the management committee (a joint committee of senior staff from York and Durham), the decision not to issue the acceptance test certificate was made based on the technical report...."

"The acceptance test looked at the performance of the entire facility, including the many environmental and contractual requirements—and required Covanta to sample and measure everything from ash produced to noise, soil, odour and various other emissions.

"The test found that Covanta met environmental and electrical generation requirements, but was producing 2.5% more ash than it should be."

This article raises several points of concern for me, including: Why is this province once again contracting services to foreign companies like Covanta? Is it because this American company can't sell its own product to its own government? We know that the US stopped building new incinerators back in 1977, and so—this is strictly speculation—I guess they needed to take their product on the road.

More importantly, why does this government seek every opportunity to invest in anyone but Ontario? This was one more opportunity to create a program that was built in Ontario or even Canada, but this province is ensuring that Ontarians don't make the cut when it comes to big projects like this one.

Frankly, does this province really need to invest in another bridge that can't make it through one Canadian winter? We had that example just last session.

At the end of the day, this bill claims to want to create a waste-free Ontario, but the fact is that burning waste contributes to climate change. Incinerators emit more carbon dioxide per unit of electricity than coal-fired plants, and this government is very proud of its record on coal, as I said before. As I mentioned, incineration also drives up climate-changing cycles of new resources pulled out from the earth, processed in factories and shipped around the world and, then, repopulating our incinerators and landfills.

Let's take a look at Denmark, the poster child of Europe's incinerator industry. They recently discovered that their incinerators were releasing double the quantity of carbon dioxide than originally estimated and had probably been doing so for years, causing Denmark to miss their Kyoto Protocol greenhouse gases reduction targets.

I say this because it's time to look at zero-waste solutions as our partners throughout the world are doing. Zero waste is the design and management of products and processes to reduce the volume and toxicity of waste and materials, conserve and recover all resources, and not burn or bury them.

Take a look at places like Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Delaware and California, who have either banned or seriously restricted new waste incinerators in favour of zero-waste practices and policies.

That's what real leadership on climate change and energy looks like. That's the kind of leadership that the people of Ontario crave but, instead, are offered token legislation that is vague and undefined.

Bill 151's list of provincial interests includes aims such as minimizing greenhouse gas emissions; minimizing waste generation; increasing the durability, reusability and recyclability of products and packaging; holding those responsible for the design of products and packaging responsible for the end-of-life management; reducing hazardous and toxic materials in products and packaging; minimizing need for waste disposal; plus, "do any other related thing that may be prescribed."

These sound like lofty ideas but, at the end of the day, we know there are no real targets or goals here. I wanted to see a strong vision for climate change and zero waste but, instead, we have baby steps. I guess a step is better than no step. When they consult lobbyists, producers, business people, environmentalists and consumers—and, I hope, everyday Ontarians—I hope this will be stronger legislation that we can all be proud of.

I have a few quotes here from stakeholders. People are excited about energy. We want to see a better energy program. We want to make a difference for the next generation. I'll read a couple of quotes from stakeholders.

AMO says: The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has "long advocated for extended producer responsibility for waste diversion program..." AMO has also been concerned about rising costs to municipalities imposed on them by IFOs that find ways to avoid paying their traditional 50% share of costs. Obviously AMO would welcome legislation that would shift these responsibilities and costs to producers, but it notes that the actual effect of this act will depend on regulations, and that transition is estimated to take three to five years. That's what we've been saying, Speaker. Again, we're all speaking on the bill; we're all debating the bill. We're hopeful with this bill, but there is a timeline that we're all just waiting for the details on.

The Workers Health and Safety Centre is hopeful that Bill 151 will result in fewer hazardous materials in the waste stream, noting that while the Toxics Reduction Act requires monitoring and reduction of plans, the implementation of these plans is not mandatory. That's a concern that they have as well.

I thank you very much for the time to contribute to this debate, Speaker. I actually look forward to when this legislation comes back with the consultations from stakeholders, and to believe that this government is going to make a difference to a waste-free Ontario and make life better for Ontarians throughout the province.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The member from London—Fanshawe makes some very good points; I don't disagree with them. She points to the linkage between the cap-and-trade bill and the circular economy waste-free Ontario bill, because they are linked. This is a fundamental shift, probably the largest shift in public economic policy and environmental policy in maybe 50 years in Canada.

The time frame will come forward in regulation, as they always do. We have to move quite quickly on them because we have to dismantle the IFOs and to establish the right of the resource recovery agency that will replace all of these bureaucracies. The penalties are quite severe if you do not comply. Industry is very aggressively moving on this. I spoke to the Ontario waste association yesterday, and the level of enthusiasm and drive is—people think that they can have this done quite quickly.

The other thing we're concerned about is household costs. It's interesting to look at the evidence. The con-

sumer price index, which is the thing that determines the cost of living in jurisdictions: What are the two provinces that have the lowest increases in CPI? Well, they've been British Columbia and Quebec, the two jurisdiction in Canada that have for many years had a price on carbon; BC at twice the rate in Ontario. They also have similar legislation on waste.

What they've done with both this legislation is that they have improved productivity. There's less waste in the economy and more resource recovery. While pollutants cost more, non-polluting energy sources both become subsidized and more available. What you've seen overall is that those two provinces have experienced the lowest increases in the consumer price index, lower than the Canadian average and lower than all Canadian provinces.

When you actually look at the range of change here, this should put Ontario much more competitively with Quebec and BC, in seeing a lower cost of living over time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to add my voice to this debate. I always appreciate the comments from the member from London–Fanshawe. She makes great sense, and I appreciate her sincerity as she debates any bill.

One thing that stuck with me, Speaker, is that she made the comment that she hopes Bill 151 could be legislation we could be proud of. Well, we are proud of the fact that we see embedded within Bill 151 elements of the PC plan which I have spoken to before, but I think we have to go further.

This act is called the Waste-Free Ontario Act. Well, if we're going to be proud of this legislation, let's walk and talk and make reality those words, "waste-free." In doing so, I would suggest that we need legislated timelines to be rid of wasteful spending and unnecessary bureaucracy. I reference specifically the eco tax program, Ontario Tire Stewardship, Orange Drop and e-waste. We want to see this government stand up and do the right thing. As opposed to just saying they're gone, let's put some measurables in place. Let's see a legislated timeline.

Over and above that, let's make sure that transparency is paramount in this legislation. Transparency is something that this Premier hoped would be one of her legacies. We see how, instead of absolutely abolishing WDO, Waste Diversion Ontario, they're sliding it into a new authority. That authority is going to be comprised of five people, hand-chosen by the minister, who in turn select six additional people. There is a huge flag here that transparency in the manner in which we would like to see it may not happen, and the friends that sit around that table will just be in place to embark the minister's—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the member from London–Fanshawe for her comments today. Obviously, I, as the member for London West, and the member for

London–Fanshawe live in the same community. We know the kind of challenges our community is facing. We have a landfill site that, in 10 years, is going to be at capacity.

We have a waste diversion rate that is far below the target that is set by the province, because, as the member pointed out in her speech, municipalities are effectively subsidizing the blue box system. They are having to subsidize the cost of recycling packaging materials that are, quite frankly, out of control. You can go in to any Costco, or any kind of big-box store, and it is appalling, the amount of packaging that is used in the products that are sold. When those materials are recycled, when they're put into the blue box, what it means is that the municipality is subsidizing the cost of recycling those materials.

So shifting the responsibility to producers is something that is long overdue. It's something that the NDP has been calling for for a very long time. Our concerns about this bill revolve around the vagueness, around the lack of timelines and around the lack of targets. We are going to be at the end of the line in London in terms of the capacity of our landfill site, as the member mentioned. We need to do something now in order to get those waste diversion targets up and in order to remove that downloading of cost to municipalities that the government has imposed, not just with the blue box recycling program but in many, many different areas of the economy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm very pleased to support the bill put forward by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

I have said it earlier and I would like to reiterate it: The overarching intent of this legislation is to reduce waste, reuse, recycle and recover materials from waste so that we can create well-paying jobs in the waste diversion sector. Studies across Canada and around the world have shown that Ontario's existing waste diversion program can create up to 10 times more jobs than waste disposal.

The shift is happening throughout the world. We can sit on our hands and watch it. If we don't take action, it has economic consequences; it has environmental consequences. Why are we doing it? We are doing it for our future generations, for our children and grandchildren, so that they can get well-paying jobs and can breathe clean air, and we can reduce the strain on our health care system.

Over the past two weeks, after listening to the debate, it has been clear that the majority of the members are in support of this bill. This is a very important piece of legislation; this is a significant piece of legislation which has positive impacts. I don't see any downside to this legislation. I look forward to the speedy passage of this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for London–Fanshawe. You have two minutes.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd like to thank the Minister of Energy for being here today.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Environment.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Environment; my mistake. That was your previous portfolio, wasn't it? Environment and energy kind of go together. But, yes—the Minister of the Environment for being here—

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I appreciate you being here today and commenting on my remarks.

The member from Huron—Bruce: She is right—

Ms. Cindy Forster: She acknowledged you were the minister.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, that's right—a step in the right direction.

The member from Huron—Bruce was talking about transparency. That is extremely important in anything we do. In our role as MPPs, transparency is paramount, and it builds public confidence in the legislation that we actually create, because they're a part of that legislation they're engaging, and they feel like they're contributing to something that is actually going to make a difference, and that their voices were listened to.

It's quite surprising—not so surprising to me—that when you actually speak to constituents or to groups, their ideas, their comments, their concerns—if you really pay attention and you listen to the core subject of what they're talking about, we can create very effective legislation by listening to what they say.

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I'd also like to thank the member from London West for her comments as well, talking about the fact that the timelines in this legislation impact London because of the fact that we have that dump—and the member from Mississauga—Brampton South.

I think the message—and I've read some comments from stakeholders—is that AMO talks about being concerned about this legislation because, of course, the act will depend on regulations; and the transition time it takes, we mentioned timelines; and the Workers Health and Safety Centre: They talk about how the mandatory requirement about implementation of these plans isn't there. So here are two concerns that stakeholders have—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been more than six and one half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise. Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, the government wishes the debate to continue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, I should let you know that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Burlington and the member from Sudbury.

Bill 151: It almost sounds like a bit of a love-in this morning, because I think we all support it to some extent. I know some members from the opposition are really struggling to find the negative side of this thing, but it's difficult, which is good, which is fantastic, because we're talking about the environment. Obviously, I worry about what I leave behind to my kids and grandkids and great-grandkids. So anything that we can do to alleviate those fears for our future generations is a good thing.

I can refer to part of my riding, a county in Northumberland, where there's only one viable landfill site, with not much life left. I know they have been working diligently with the tools they have. They did an enormous amount of rehabilitation and excavation, removed what they could. Of course, this is very costly. It should have never gotten to that stage. I was there one time on county council, and we made some of those decisions with the best tools that we had. Whenever we can provide better tools to protect our environment, it's always a good thing.

So I look forward to Bill 151 passing, which will allow us an enormous amount of consultation with all the stakeholders: municipalities, industry, folks in waste diversion and retailers—with the packaging that we see today, that we hear from all sides of the House, that's certainly excessive.

I just want to maybe take a couple of minutes to talk about the draft strategy for a waste-free Ontario and building that circular economy, because when you talk about waste diversion, really, it is a circle. So what does some of this strategy really mean? Ontario, as we said in the past, is showing some leadership by taking some action to support this circular economy, a system where nothing is wasted and valuable materials destined for landfill are put back into the economy without negative effects on people or the environment.

I would add that quite often, as I talk with my constituents and, frankly, with people outside my constituency in the province, we talk about the enormous amount of waste when it comes to—well, packaging seems to be the most common. I know that around Christmastime, with nine grandkids—I see that as they open their gifts, and that only happens once a year, but we're talking 365 days—that my recycling pail can't keep up. I guess, on the funny side of this, sometimes my younger grandkids, I will admit, spend a lot more time playing with packaging than they do with what's inside—

Interjection: There's a lot of it.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: —because there's a lot of it.

I really, really think that, as we debate this in this House, I certainly look forward to that regulatory regime.

As I talked, just a couple of days ago, to some of the folks at the ROMA/Good Roads convention, obviously, Bill 151 did come up as part of the discussion. I can tell you, although there were some questions—same as there are in this House—there was also a lot of optimism, same as there is in this House.

As we move forward—and I know that the opposition criticized the length of time that this is going to take, but

I think it's time well invested, because many times we—I'm not pointing fingers at anybody, but we all did it. We try to get from A to Z at a very fast pace, and sometimes we trip. I would say that with such an important issue, we need to take the right time to make sure we get it right and get it done.

Speaker, thank you for the time to allow me to say a few words about this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now recognize the member for Burlington.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm delighted to stand in this place today on behalf of my residents in Burlington and join the honourable member from Northumberland—Quinte West, the member for Toronto Centre, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and indeed colleagues from across the House to talk about an issue that's incredibly important and difficult to tackle, but it's critically important that we do so as legislators. I'm delighted in that context to participate in today's discussions.

It's often said that there's no constant in life except change. Members in this House will know, as perhaps an obvious point, that we live in a rapidly changing universe. The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change—it's not only in his mandate to help us all, as citizens and as legislators, navigate the important conversations we're having about our planet and where it's going. He lives this every day, and this is embedded within his DNA, I think. But for the rest of us who are having this conversation along with him, thinking about waste diversion and heading towards what I like to think of as a vision zero, the circular economy that my colleague from Northumberland—Quinte West talked about in terms of taking waste and diverting it properly, is really important.

A moment ago, I talked about change. Who would have thought, even 10 years ago, that we would be diverting our waste into three or four receptacles? People might have said, "Are you crazy? That's never going to happen. Human beings will never evolve. They will never separate their garbage," and yet, we are. Part of that evolution has been in the schools where our children were educated. I haven't been blessed with children; I have nieces and nephews, and I know that they talked and learned about this in school. They came home to their parents and they said, "Mom and Dad, we should be good citizens. We want to live on a planet that is free from pollution, so we want you to really show leadership in this area and divert waste and put it in different receptacles."

We have the blue bin in Halton region, and we have the green bin. I've noticed, over the years, how incredibly important that's become as I head out to the waste diversion site that's in Halton. It's very well managed, and I'm certain they do such a good job. They won awards because they're so effective at it. You go out to that waste centre and you see how much less is going into landfills now because, as individuals, we are doing our part to put garbage in the right place. We have our blue bin and our green bin and what I like to call the "rest of

stuff" bin where our garbage goes. That gets carried off, and again, there's much less in our landfills. Of course, we're doing a lot in soil remediation, which is an important and connected part of this conversation too.

I'm really pleased to be part of a government that's showing leadership by taking action to support that circular economy we've been talking about, and that we look at a system where nothing is wasted and valuable materials destined for landfills are put back into the economy and are recycled—we look often at our clothing. I will pull out the tag on a sweater, and it says, "Made from plastic bottles." I think that's amazing. Again, who would have thought 20 years ago that someone—necessity is the mother of invention, they say—would take those recyclables, that plastic, and turn it into something that we can use? So I'm proud that Ontario is showing leadership in this regard.

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Of course, as those watching today and people in my riding know, a draft strategy was released when the proposed Waste-Free Ontario Act was introduced last December. That road map continues to be commented on. We want people across Ontario to be part of this conversation we're having. That includes businesses and individuals, because we need solutions in government. We need their help to help all of us navigate to create that vision zero, to create the kind of behavioural change that we need.

Of course, this draft strategy details the key actions that support our visions and goals as a province. They establish clear provincial direction that looks at expanding producers' responsibilities for their products and packaging, diverting more waste from disposal, increasing promotion and education, and stimulating markets for recovering materials.

Earlier on in my career, I had the privilege of working at an organization in Ottawa called Sustainable Development Technology Canada, which was started by the then Chrétien government to look at making sure that our green economy has the support that it needs, and working with entrepreneurs to commercialize technology.

Canadians are excellent at innovation. They are amazing when it comes to developing technological solutions. Again, that's why it's important for us to be talking to producers and the private sector and businesses large and small about the contributions that they are indeed making already. Businesses across this province are thriving when it comes to inventing solutions that are based on "someone's trash is your treasure," as the saying goes. We need to really work with that and help that sector and encourage it to thrive.

Keeping a government on track, of course, is something that we think is very important. This proposed legislation would require the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to prepare progress reports to tell us all how we're doing, how we can improve, and celebrate our successes, because that too is incredibly important. That openness and that sharing and that discussion and vitality allows stakeholders and people on all sides of this

House to continue to contribute to that conversation. Indeed, that strategy would have to be reviewed at least every 10 years in consultation with stakeholders and the public, and it would be amended as needed. That's important too, because it creates a living, breathing, ongoing debate about the importance of waste diversion and the by-products that result as a consequence of that. It helps our government to stay on track with some vital contributions from our stakeholders.

Again, I'm happy to take part in today's debate and to join colleagues from all sides of this House. I heard a colleague say earlier that there's a bit of a love-in. I'm not surprised, because all of us understand that in this rapidly changing world where we find ourselves that we have a responsibility, as legislators, to make sure that Ontarians—businesses and individuals alike—have the tools they need to navigate the changing world that we find ourselves in, to really capture the innovation that's already happening, to assist entrepreneurs to create better and new innovative ways of doing things, and to educate our citizens. The people in my riding, where we have a bicycle-friendly community, where we have increasing numbers of people taking transit, are interested in making a personal contribution to waste diversion.

In closing, Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to take part in this very important debate today. It's been my absolute pleasure. I look forward to the ongoing conversation in the House about this very important topic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Sudbury.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm always honoured to be able to rise in this place and speak on behalf of the constituents in the great riding of Sudbury, and, of course, speak to Bill 151, the waste-free Ontario and building the circular economy act.

I'd also like to commend the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and his staff for all of their hard work on this particular file. How we handle and deal with waste is not something that I think most people think about actively on a day-to-day basis, yet pretty much every person and business will be affected by this legislation because of how all-encompassing this issue is. It took time to get it right, and I would like to recognize all those who put so much time and effort into ensuring that this legislation is as good as it is. I know consultation was widespread and I know the opposition is saying they would like to see more, but, being here three times in over 10 years, we have been talking a lot and consulting a lot.

The province's waste diversion rates have been stagnant for far too long, and that was a product of the current Waste Diversion Act introduced by the Harris government back in 2002. That bill didn't work as intended. It laid out conflicting roles and responsibilities that led to unproductive relationships and ineffective compliance and enforcement mechanisms for overseeing the single-industry funding organizations that it set up to operate each recycling program.

In addition to these programs not working as intended, that also meant that individual companies within a given

industry were limited or at least not encouraged to explore ways that they could innovate everything from product disposal to packaging in order to reduce waste and increase the recovery of material that is currently being sent to landfills. Under this bill, Mr. Speaker, we are shifting the responsibility for recovering the resources and reducing the waste associated with a given widget and its packaging to its producer. That means that now producers will have to directly consider the externalities associated with disposing of the widget and its packaging in its design process. Companies would probably then look at whether there was a way to produce their widget in a way that limits those externalities. This could mean lower input costs for the company and a better environment for everyone.

I can think of a few things, as a father of two young daughters. I know my colleague from Northumberland—Quinte West talked about being a grandfather, but as a father you go out and buy products, and one of the things you have to buy is toothpaste. Not that I'm here to pick on the toothpaste companies, but they will package together a couple of packages of toothpaste. So it's wrapped in bits of plastic. You take the plastic off and then you have the cardboard box. You take the toothpaste out of the box and then it's still in another container. When you take the cap off, it's sealed once again. That's just an example of what some of the companies are doing in terms of packaging. Now we are shifting that onus and making sure that the companies look at what type of packaging they're putting out there to ensure what we're putting into our landfills.

Also, I know we hear a lot and we're talking a lot about the four Rs now: reduce, reuse, recycle and recover. I know we all have learned lessons from our parents, one way or another, and I have a great story that I learned from my father, whom I lost this summer. He was 101 years old. He was 56 when I was born; I'm 46 now. He would have been 102 last month.

But he said we had become a throwaway generation, that you just toss everything; besides the packaging, you just toss everything and go buy something else.

A great example of the "recover" piece that I'd like to talk about, Mr. Speaker, in some of my last few minutes is what my dad told me about "recover." We were moving one day from our old house to our new house, a few years ago. I had this nice picture frame and I dropped it. Of course, my dad being there as the supervisor sitting in the chair and telling us what to do, he said, "Take that and throw that in the back of the car." I'm like, "Well, Dad, it's broken. I'm just going to throw it out." He said, "No, no, throw it in the back of the car." You do what your father tells you, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure we all are aware. I put it in the back of the car.

A couple of months pass. I bring him a picture of my two kids, their school pictures, which is what we do for their grandkids, and they put them up. About three weeks later, I show up at his house for a visit and there is that picture that I gave him, nicely framed. I say, "Wow, that's a nice frame. Where did you get that?" He's like, "That was the one you were going to throw out."

We don't recognize that you can do many things with recovery. I know that that's not very particular to the bill, but recovery—when you're looking at what we're asking the companies to do when it comes to packaging, we're asking them to make sure they consider what we get as consumers and what they can do to save costs. Imagine these toothpaste companies, if they don't have to package three or four times to put out these toothpaste tubes that are already sealed.

Let's not talk about the electronics industry. Have you ever tried to open up—if you're fortunate to buy a new TV? Or as a father who has to buy one of his daughters the new toy, it's like you need a degree in engineering to open the thing. Right? It's strapped in there. It's placed in there, and then you've got plastic around it. It's strapped in. Once you get through that, there's a whole other layer of things that you have to cut, and more plastic. Where does this all go? It's recycled. Is there really a need for us, as consumers, as parents—first off, you get frustrated because your kids are asking you to “get it open quickly, Dad.” Secondly, you've got to figure out how to open it quickly, so you end up just pulling things apart, breaking something, and then you've got to go buy something else.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: It's Christmas. You want to be in a good mood. Right?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Yes.

This bill is doing some really good things. It really is focusing on making sure that we can stop a lot of the waste that is currently being sent to our landfills, putting the onus on the companies and the producers, and making sure that we are looking at the circular economy.

With that, I know I have much more to say, but my time is up. I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 1011 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jeff Yurek: We have a lot of guests here today. I would like to welcome Carol Timmings, president-elect of the RNAO; Veronique Boscart, a board member; Cheryl Yost, a board member; Angela Cooper Brathwaite, a board member; Elizabeth Edwards, a board member; and a special welcome to Cathie Walker, who's a constituent of mine in St. Thomas. Welcome.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It's my pleasure to welcome Carol Maxwell, who is here from my riding and also here with the RNAO this morning.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: There are two members of the RNAO who are here with us today from Oakville. Please give a warm Queen's Park welcome to Leanne Siracusa and Judith MacDonnell.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd also like to welcome Larissa Gadsby and Sarah Harjee, nurses from Kitchener-Waterloo here with the RNAO.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: We have Debbie Kane from the RNAO, whom I had breakfast with this morning, as well as Kayla Spencer, a young nursing student.

Hon. Brad Duguid: You paid, right? You paid for breakfast?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Don't heckle the introductions.

Did you finish, member from Windsor?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I did, and thank you the heckle, Speaker.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I, too, am pleased to welcome very important people from the RNAO, specifically the Durham Northumberland chapter: Betsy Jackson, Angela Cooper Brathwaite, Marianne Cochrane, Regina Elliott, Julia Fineczko, Carol Timmings, of course, and Grace Wilson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Tim Hudak: If I could, I have two separate introductions this morning.

First, welcome to Nathan Kelly, a member of the RNAO from Grimsby in my riding, part of the ACT Team interventionist program for our vulnerable population in Niagara, which I highly recommend that the government continue to support.

Secondly, Wendy Ward, the mother of page Charlotte Fritz, will be joining us this afternoon for the budget. I'd like to welcome her in advance to Queen's Park.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is my privilege to welcome Janet Hunt, Akuah Frempong and Amanda Dodge, who have joined us today from London as members of the RNAO.

Mr. John Fraser: On behalf of my Ottawa caucus colleagues, I'd like to welcome some registered nurses from Ottawa: Una Ferguson, Camilla Ferriera, Wendy Pearson and Riek van den Berg.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to welcome members of the RNAO from my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex: Marian McEwan and Ailla Tangkengko.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to welcome, from the RNAO, Sheila Bagala and Carolyn Davies, whom I met with this morning.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me welcome two good friends of mine in the members' east gallery: Colleen Stanton, who is a nurse, and Bob Harper. Thank you.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to recognize Innis O'Grady, who is in the members' gallery this morning. Innis is studying political science at Ryerson and is currently doing a work placement in my office. I want to welcome Innis to Queen's Park this morning.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to welcome Erin Cowan here, with the RNAO, from Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I had a great breakfast with five representatives of the RNAO from the Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario area. They're up in the gallery: Carine Gallagher, Crystal Edwards, Patricia Sevean,

Katie Piette and Michelle Spadoni. Welcome. Great breakfast; thank you very much.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to introduce Rebecca Harbridge and Janet Hunt from the RNAO, whom I had the pleasure of meeting with this morning.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'd like to welcome and thank my friend Cathy Lacroix and all the nurses in Toronto Centre, and the best nurse in Toronto Centre, Rick Neves, my partner of 22 years, who reminds me how important RNs are every day.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to welcome from Huntsville Jane Radey, who is also chair of the Registered Nurse First Assistant organization in the province, and also Lise Thomas, from Sudbury, whom I had the pleasure of having breakfast with this morning.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would also like to introduce some RNs who are with us today, beginning with Dr. Doris Grinspun, who is the CEO of our Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the RNAO, and a number of board members: Jennifer Flood, Pat Sevean, Janet Hunt, Claudette Holloway, Hilda Swirsky, Nathan Kelly, Wendy Pearson and Beatriz Jackson.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to introduce the mother of one of our pages today, Patricia Bhikam Bhola, who is in the gallery and who will be here this afternoon as well, and also Lori Jennings, a registered nurse from Sarnia-Lambton whom I had breakfast with this morning.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to introduce the following board members here today for the RNAO lobby day: Marianne Cochrane, Aric Rankin, Rebecca Harbridge and Debbie Kane are joining us. I also see, up in the gallery, from my riding, Julia Fineczko and Grace Wilson.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm very pleased to welcome many of my former colleagues and friends, visiting us today from the RNAO. First, from the Scarborough nurses, Claudette Holloway, Sonia Chin, Lhamo Dolkar, Isolde Daiski, Sarabeth Silver, and my nephew, a young nurse just graduated from Western—his birthday is today—Neil Kikuta, and my good friend Carol Timmings from Toronto Public Health, who is the incoming RNAO president.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce Cheryl Yost, Lyndsey Burtenshaw and Tasha Vandervliet, all here with RNAO, and they're all from my riding of Perth-Wellington.

M. Michael Mantha: Je veux introduire, de l'Association des infirmières et des infirmiers, M^{me} Jennifer Flood, avec qui j'ai eu un bon déjeuner, Stephanie Blaney et le D^r Paul-André Gauthier. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure as well to introduce Dr. Doris Grinspun, CEO of the RNAO, as well as to welcome all the RNAO nurses here today, and especially the nurse from my riding of Davenport, Hillary Ward. Welcome.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I want to welcome two RNAO nurses whom I had breakfast with this morning: Cindy Baker and Trudy Hall, wife of a good friend of mine, Gordie, whom we also call "Two-Four."

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in wishing my seatmate, the member from Halton, a very happy 21st birthday.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I just want to point out that Doris Grinspun, CEO, is actually a member of my constituency—but I appreciate others introducing her—and is joined by Marion Zych, who is also from Beaches-East York.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It gives me great pleasure to introduce a registered nurse from Ottawa, Una Ferguson, who is here with the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

Hon. Mario Sergio: I want to welcome and say that I have enjoyed chatting with the nurse representative from York University and a student from York University. I had a lovely chat and a good breakfast. I welcome them to Queen's Park today.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I am delighted to welcome back to the Legislature, from Kitchener Centre, Christine Purdon; her son, William Stuart, who served as a page here last year; and her daughter, Mary Stuart, who is participating in our model Parliament. Welcome.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: If my eyes are not failing me, I think I see Paul Gauthier up in the gallery, from RNAO. I'd like to welcome him to Queen's Park here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

I would just add a quick editorial to thank the two nurses I spoke to this morning, in our special day for nurses, from the riding of Brant. Thank you for being here.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. No matter what this government tries to spin, the reality is that this government is gutting health care. In order to pay for Liberal government scandals, waste and mismanagement, they have made the choice to cut health care: \$815 million taken out of patient care; 50 medical residency spots cut despite the fact 800,000 Ontarians do not have a family doctor; \$50 million taken away from seniors for physiotherapy; and 1,200 nurses cut in the last year. The impact is clear to patients: You are damaging the quality of care that we expect in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, my question is simple: What other cuts can we expect in today's budget? What other surprises are we going to see in store for our health care system because we cannot sustain this ongoing assault on our health care system?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to also welcome the RNAO to Queen's Park.

I want to just say to the member opposite, and the people of Ontario, that we continue to increase health care funding year over year. The contention the Leader of the Opposition is putting forward is just not accurate, Mr. Speaker. The fact is, we continue to increase health care funding. Over 24,000 more nurses are working in Ontario since we took office. Over 10,800 RNs have been added since 2003.

The fact is, we continue to increase funding. We invest the capital dollars in terms of hospitals. We're investing in home care. We're investing in mental health supports—all of that in recognition of a changing demographic and an increased need in the health care system. I look forward to the budget this afternoon to see how those investments continue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: If you really wanted to welcome nurses to Queen's Park, you can start by not cutting 1,200 nurses.

But the attack on health care goes beyond cuts to nurses. What I'm seeing across Ontario are significant cuts to small—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've had to ask both sides to come to order when a question or an answer is put. If that's not going to be satisfactory, I'll move as fast as I can into warnings. This is your first warning about warnings.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Beyond the cuts to nursing, what we're seeing is an attack on small-town hospitals. I look at my own riding where Georgian Bay General is facing a proposed \$5-million cut by the Minister of Health. It's going to wipe out the obstetrics unit. I look at the news coming out of Welland, where they're very worried they're going to lose their hospital, given what we're hearing from the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Premier is: Will she start standing up for small-town Ontario and recognize that you can't give up on all of these hospitals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There are a couple of issues that the Leader of the Opposition has raised there. One is about how to deliver the best health care in a region where there may need to be a change in our consolidation of institutions.

Again, I think it is very responsible that in a community like Welland there would be a discussion about how to best deliver services, to make sure that the most modern and most up-to-date facilities are in place.

In terms of the positions in the health care system, we have to deal with the facts. No matter how much the Leader of the Opposition wants to make his rhetoric true, if it's not the fact, then that's just not possible. The reality is that over 24,000 more nurses are working in Ontario since we took office, and 10,800 RNs have been added since 2003. Mr. Speaker, we have increased the number of nurses in this province. We will continue—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, this isn't a game. What you're doing to the health care system is having a real, damaging effect. Everyone knows you're switching full-time to part-time. Everyone knows you're diminishing investments in health care. Since 2003, you're saying that health care spending has gone up? That's 13 years ago. We have 150,000 new patients in the system. Of course there's going to be costs.

I'm looking right now at the recent headlines that have come out in the last few months: 10 nurses cut at Almonte General Hospital; 17 nurses cut at Southlake Regional Health Centre; 20 full-time positions cut at Soldiers; 22 nurses—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Two things: Number one, make sure you're making your responses and questions to the Chair. The second thing is, I will now move to individual members—closing in on the warnings.

Please finish.

Mr. Patrick Brown: —Twenty-two nurses cut at the Sault Area Hospital, 33 nurses cut at Cambridge Memorial and 120 nurses cut at Windsor Regional Hospital—I hear comments and heckling from the other side: "Don't be so angry." I'm angry about 1,200 nurses being cut because it's affecting our health care system. It's not acceptable. What I want to hear from the Premier is that you're going to stop this attack on Ontario's nurses.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member of Beaches—East York will come to order. The Minister of Agriculture will come to order. The Minister of Natural Resources will come to order. The deputy House leader will come to order. Let me see; I think I have them. The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke will come to order. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade will come to order. If there are any more comments, I'll move to naming.

Now that that round is over, I'll switch to warnings because I am loath to think that anyone would not want to sit here for the budget.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: What's damaging to Ontario's health care is the position of that party, Mr. Speaker: the position where they fired 6,000 nurses, where doctors were fleeing this province because they were so disrespected by the PC Party and where they made a commitment in the last campaign to fire 100,000 workers, including 5,000 health care workers. Frankly, what Ontarians should be angry about is that member's position when he was a part of a federal government—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It goes both ways.

Mr. Jim Wilson: The health transfer went up every year. Six per cent last year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think maybe the member is stretching it a little bit—the member from Simcoe—Grey.

Please finish.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: What's been damaging to Ontario's health care system is that member's position when he was a member of the Harper government that decreased the federal Canada Health Transfer to this province, Mr. Speaker. He knows he was part of that government, and he stood silent.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport will come to order. The member from Hamilton Mountain will come to order.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. Over the past week, the Ontario PC caucus has made three straightforward, reasonable demands on behalf of the people of Ontario of this year's budget. In doing so, we told the story of 74-year-old widow Cathy Van Breda and her astronomical hydro bills. We asked the Premier to come up with a plan to make energy more affordable for Cathy and thousands of seniors like her, and we asked that the plan include stopping any further sale of Hydro One.

This budget must take action. Speaker, will the Liberal government stand up for families, seniors and businesses by tackling Ontario's skyrocketing hydro rates, and will they stop the further sale of shares in Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say to the member's constituent and to anyone in the province who is in need of support in terms of paying their electricity bills that there are a number of programs that we have put in place. The Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit can save individuals up to \$973 a year, and up to \$1,100 per year for qualifying seniors. The Low-Income Energy Assistance Program provides emergency financial support, and the Ontario Electricity Support Program is designed specifically for low- to modest-income families, to help them.

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The reality is that we have made investments in the energy sector, which was degraded when we came into office. It had not been maintained by the previous government. Those investments have now meant that we have reliable, clean energy in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: There are thousands of Cathy Van Bredas who are looking for help and relief from this government, not lip service.

Back to the Premier: Secondly, we noted time and time again the cost that this government's scandals, waste and mismanagement is having on funding for essential services. Most notably, we've seen how Ontario's government is no longer able to properly fund the health care system that families and seniors deserve. The government's cuts to front-line health care are well known: an \$815-million cut to physician services; a \$54-million cut to the 2015 health budget; 50 medical residency positions cut; and a \$50-million cut to physiotherapy services for seniors.

Will this government's budget reverse the current and planned cuts to doctors, nurses and hospitals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just as I did yesterday, let me speak to the requests that are coming from the other side. I've heard a number of members speak to these three contradictory issues, so I expect that the next gambit the member will take is on eliminating the deficit.

The reality is, we are increasing health care funding. We continue to increase health care funding. We continue to hire health care workers. There are hospitals right now—one of the hospitals the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, Soldiers' hospital, that is posting to hire nurses.

The fact is that if you look at the changes, you have to look at the whole picture; you have to look at the hiring as well.

In terms of energy prices, we have supports in place. We have programs in place to help people. And we're on track to eliminate the deficit. We're tackling all those things, not in the contradictory way that the opposition—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Again to the Premier: Finally, I think we need to have a credible plan from this government to balance the budget, including immediate action to pay down the debt. It can't just be another Liberal stretch goal.

If the government doesn't act, they're going to continue to cut health care funding, close needed schools and keep cutting services from our most vulnerable in this province, all just to make up for their scandal, waste and mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, will the government finally stop living in a fiscal fantasyland and commit to a plan that will pay down our debt?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we have had that plan in place. We have overachieved on our targets. We are on track to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds—Grenville is warned—especially when I'm standing.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, in his report, the Financial Accountability Officer said that we were on track to lower our 2015-16 deficit. The fact is, that plan has been in place.

But the first impetus of this government, the first imperative for us, is to make sure that we continue to sup-

port the services that the people of Ontario need, that we continue to create jobs, that we strengthen the economy.

The fact is, the plan that we have been implementing, to invest in the people of this province and infrastructure, is working. We will continue to implement that plan. I look forward to the opposition's response when we bring forward the budget, which is the latest instalment of that plan.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised that auto insurance rates would come down by 15%, and they even put that in their budget, but people aren't getting the savings they were promised because the Premier considered that a stretch goal—a goal that was achievable but the government simply did not make a priority and did not achieve.

The Premier promised not to cut health care and not to cut education services, but I guess that was a stretch goal as well, because nurses are being fired and education services are being cut.

How should Ontarians know which of the upcoming budget promises can be trusted and which ones are going to be stretch goals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows full well that the auto insurance rates, on average, across the province have gone down by over 7%. There are some companies who have already attained the 15% reduction in premium rates.

It's an important goal for us. We continue to work on it. We continue to work to get costs out of the system. But we're not going to put up with a situation where people can't actually find auto insurance because companies have left the field completely.

We will continue to invest in health care. I would ask both the member of the third party and the opposition to look at where the hiring is happening across the province. You have to look at the whole equation to determine how the health care system is improving in the province and the health care workers who are in place.

I look forward to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, it's shameful that there are fewer nurses per capita now, based on our population, than there were in 1986.

I remember in 2014 asking the Premier about the sale of Hydro One, and she said to me, "We are keeping these assets in public hands." Of course, she's already sold 15% of that public asset—now 15% of it is in private hands—and she's planning to sell off control. I guess it was a stretch goal to keep Hydro One in public hands.

Can the Premier tell Ontarians whether this budget is going to show that even keeping that 40% was actually a stretch goal and now we're going to see all of it sold off?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just be clear: We ran on a plan. We're implementing that plan, and that plan is working.

We said to the people of Ontario, "We are going to invest in your talent and your skills. We're going to make sure we have the most highly educated workforce in the world."

We said, "We're going to invest in 21st-century infrastructure: the roads, the bridges, the transit, the water systems that we know are necessary for economic growth."

We said, "We are going to work with the private sector, yes. We are going to work with business to make sure that we put supports in place and partner with them to bring business." We are the number one jurisdiction for foreign direct investment for two years in a row, Mr. Speaker.

And we said, "We are going to ensure that there's retirement security in this province for everyone who has worked throughout their lives."

That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker. You know, I would have expected that the NDP would have found a lot in that plan to recommend it to them. I believe that it is—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I would like to see this Premier take that question—that she ran on selling off Hydro One—to the public and ask Ontarians if that's what they believe she ran on, because I think she would get a very interesting answer to that question.

People deserve health care when and where they need it. Students deserve an education that's second to none. People deserve to know that when this government says they're not going to sell a public asset, they're actually not going to sell off that public asset and give it to their friends and hand it away without any sort of consultation.

These are the fundamentals. This government is getting those fundamentals absolutely wrong.

In this upcoming budget, will Ontarians see their priorities being addressed, like stopping the cuts to services, like stopping the sell-off of a public asset? Or will it be more of the Premier prioritizing the interests of her friends instead of the interests and needs of the people of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just continue to emphasize, to illustrate why I believe that the plan that we have put in place, the plan that we ran on—which, in terms of the fiscal foundation, was exactly the plan the NDP ran on, except they were going to take \$600 million more out of services.

We can look at objective assessments of what's happening. Let's look at the facts: The 2015 third quarter results show that Ontario's real GDP has grown by 0.9%, which outpaces both the Canadian and the US economies. As I've said, we are ranked first for foreign direct investment in North America for the second year in a row. Ontario was the only province in Canada to gain jobs in January. So we're doing a little bit better than other parts of the country.

There's more that we have to do, but the plan that we put in place is working, Mr. Speaker. You'll see the latest installment in the budget this afternoon—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

1100

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Over the past two months, members from all three parties have travelled across the province, to Hamilton, Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Windsor, to hear what Ontarians needed to see in today's budget. They shared their concerns about the economy, about education, about health care and about the high cost of energy.

Today is budget day, but the finance committee is still writing the report that would normally inform this budget. This has never happened. It's a new era of pretend consultation under this Liberal government. It's been reported recently in the media: "Ontario's pre-budget consultations have gone from polite fiction to political farce. We will all be the poorer for it."

The only thing clear to New Democrats and the people of this province is this government's blatant disregard for what Ontarians have to say and the reality of their lives. Will Ontarians finally see their priorities reflected in today's budget or will it be peppered with more broken promises and cuts to front-line services?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We pay very close attention—not just in the lead-up to the budget. The day after the budget is released, we start having a conversation with the people of Ontario about the next budget. The reality is that we're listening to people all the time. I travel the province, personally. My colleagues are all over the province talking to people constantly. I know that the reason that the finance minister went to the committee was he wanted to have that interaction.

We determined that it was important that we get the budget out early. It is early. It's an early budget; I acknowledge that. There's a lot of uncertainty in this country about the economic reality. We wanted to make sure that the people of the province had the information, had the latest update, and knew what the plan was going to be in order for them to be able to understand the year going forward.

That's what this budget is about; that's what the early date is about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Premier, I want you to hear what Ontarians told us.

Bev Mathers from the Ontario Nurses' Association said, "RN care in Ontario hospitals is being seriously eroded. In 2015, we lost 775 RN positions. Since January 1, 2012, more than 2,500 RN positions have been deleted"—2,500, a cut of five million patient care RN hours.

Tom Cooper, director of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, told us, "Precarious employment affects approximately 44% of employees in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area." He implored this government to take action because there are "enough kids using food banks in" Hamilton "alone to fill 270 classrooms."

David Musyj, CEO of Windsor Regional Hospital, where 169 RNs were just cut, told us that their hospital's hydro costs increased by \$700,000 just this year.

Will Ontarians see their voices reflected in this budget today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, they will. Yes, they will, Mr. Speaker. They absolutely will, and on the issues that the member opposite has raised, whether it is support for hospitals or whether it is the hiring of nurses. The reality is that the member opposite doesn't talk about the nurses who are hired. She's not talking about the health care workers who are being hired.

In terms of precarious work, I was surprised, quite frankly, that the NDP wasn't more supportive of the support that we put in place for personal support workers, developmental support workers and early childhood educators—a direct increase to the salaries of those workers who have been at the bottom of the salary scale. I would have thought that in terms of precarious work, they would have been lauding that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Actually, your time was up, but I was also standing to have a little bit of quiet.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Premier, what is more than disappointing is that this budget consultation was so flawed. New Democrats are hopeful, though, that in the 2016 budget, we're finally going to see a strong commitment to improving health care and education, to creating good jobs and stopping the sale of Hydro One. That's what Ontarians asked us to focus on and that's what we are doing.

Business leaders from across this province asked us to focus on more affordable energy. Community leaders emphasized that this government has no mandate to sell Hydro One and correctly identified the lost revenue for this cash-strapped province—which you actually put in place, Premier.

Because the finance minister rushed this budget forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chair, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —he doesn't have the report that the finance committee is still writing. This government doesn't have all the information and, apparently, you're not interested in getting any of this information from the people of this province.

Will you listen to the people of this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You also need to watch for the Chair.

Again, a reminder to all members: You speak to the Chair. You're speaking to people in the third person. It helps with the debate.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I acknowledge that the budget is early this year. The delegations and the information that came to the committee are a matter of public record. The fact is that people will see their voices reflected in this budget.

But I would note that the member opposite, in her rant, in her rhetoric—and in the rhetoric that I heard from her leader on the radio this morning—said nothing about the crying need for infrastructure to be built in this province, and said nothing about the need to increase support for the roads, the bridges and the transit.

This member is from the Kitchener-Waterloo region. She should understand how important it is that we have the resources to make the investments that are needed to make that corridor functional.

So we will continue to implement our plan, but it includes investing in infrastructure that they are studiously ignoring.

TAXATION

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Premier: Some of us are puzzled about media reports on today's budget, a budget being tabled two months earlier than usual.

In December 2013, a government panel proposed to hike gas taxes up to 10 cents a litre across the land. That dampened Christmas spirit faster than Scrooge stealing presents. People in rural, northern and right across Ontario don't have alternatives to driving. They can't afford higher gas taxes.

In spite of the panel's recommendation, Premier Wynne eventually said that there would not be a gas tax. Now, two years later, we have suggestions of a new gas tax, sold as a carbon tax, sold as carbon trading, a cap-and-trading system of tax.

Premier, you said "no gas tax." Are you now bringing in a gas tax?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This party's asks that they've put forward in terms of the budget are completely inconsistent. But here is consistency: This is a party that has no interest in dealing with climate change, that has no plan to deal with climate change. Regardless of what the leader says—that they think that it's a big challenge—there's no plan. There's no acceptance of the reality that you actually have to take action if you're going to tackle climate change.

The reality is that we are putting a cap-and-trade system in place. There will be mitigations. In fact, we expect that there may be a four-cent or a 4.3-cent increase, on average, in gas. But in fact, in terms of the cost of electricity, for example, we expect that there could be a reduction in the cost of electricity as a result of cap-and-trade.

But we have to tackle climate change. The costs of not tackling climate change are far, far greater—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Well, my point: 13 years ago, after the election, we all realized, "Hang onto your wallet." In

relatively short order, Premier McGuinty brought in the largest income tax increase in the history of Ontario, the so-called health tax. He promised no new taxes. In 2007, he did it again. He broke his promise, with the largest consumption tax in the history of Ontario, the HST.

Now it's the Wynne budget, to stampede a cap-and-trade tax, a reported 4.3-cent tax on a litre of gas, and that's just at the wholesale level. What extra tax on gas will we pay retail, after markups, after the HST? What are we going to pay at the pumps?

Two years ago, Premier Wynne said "no gas tax." Is this an early budget just to sidestep public consultation, sneak in your gas tax, break your promise of no gas tax, and essentially to lie to the people of Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. The member will withdraw.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And now I am going to warn everyone that if this continues a trend, I will name. It's not going to happen.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: You know, I have to commend the opposition. We've finally seen them show their true colours. The Leader of the Opposition, for 10 years—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Next time, you're named.

Carry on.

1110

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, I have to compliment the opposition for showing their true colours, finally, because this little "be anything you want to be to anybody who will ask you a question" has been just too cute by half.

The Leader of the Opposition spent 10 years in Ottawa as a leading voice in a government that sabotaged every single international climate change initiative. It will go down in history as the lost decade of climate change. Now the official opposition has said that they can deal with climate change with no price on carbon, even though, in British Columbia and Quebec, when they put a price on carbon—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, second time. The member from Nepean-Carleton, come to order.

New question.

POVERTY

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Recently, we learned that the province is

currently not tracking deaths of Ontario homeless and has no real understanding of the scope of the tragedy. In the 2015 budget, we learned of a major cut to the Local Poverty Reduction Fund before the program had even begun. Speaker, the Liberal rhetoric and record on homelessness and poverty simply don't match up.

My question is simple: How can the government claim to be ending homelessness when they don't even have the necessary data to do so?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to say that the Local Poverty Reduction Fund is alive and well and actually taking shape in this province. It's \$50 million over six years. Forty-one organizations collaborating across the province are actually driving poverty reduction in their communities. There are some fantastic initiatives under that fund. We're looking forward to the next round, and then we're looking forward to the third round, Speaker.

The Local Poverty Reduction Fund—I urge all members to be aware of what it is and to encourage their communities to participate in this. It's a very exciting initiative to drive change based on evidence.

Perhaps in the supplementary, I'll deal with the issue of homelessness.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: In pre-budget consultations, which the Deputy Premier should read, since the budget was written without actually listening to Ontarians, Poverty Free Thunder Bay reported that in 2013, the average—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader, second time. The member from Ottawa—Orléans, second time.

Carry on.

Ms. Sarah Campbell:—occupancy rate of the homeless shelter was 123%. This is unacceptable. Some grassroots numbers say the number of homeless deaths in the GTA alone is more than 800 people, many of whom are simply and tragically named John and Jane Does. The most vulnerable Ontarians are becoming invisible statistics in death. They deserve better from this government.

Will we see more cuts to poverty reduction programs in the impending budget?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know we're all looking forward to this afternoon, where you will see a continued commitment to address poverty and homelessness in this province. Our commitment to end chronic homelessness in 10 years is under way, and some communities that are taking leadership roles, like my own of London, are—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're actually seeing organizations like the Salvation Army converting their homeless shelter to supportive housing, because they are with us on the notion that homelessness is just unacceptable. We need to provide a place where people can live.

It saves us all money. It saves our health care system money—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton Mountain, second time.

Hon. Deborah Matthews:—it saves our justice system money. We will be better off when we have faced this problem head-on. That work is under way. It's a bright future in this province.

NURSES

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Registered nurses play a valuable role in Ontario's health care system. As a former registered nurse and a nursing professor, I know that nurses are the largest group of health care professionals, and who provide quality care in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt and across this province in the hospitals, in the community, correctional services, schools, long-term-care homes and retirement homes.

The influence and impact nurses have on their patients, their families and this province can't be quantified or measured because they're a dedicated, hard-working, knowledgeable and caring group of individuals who give so much of themselves at work and in our community every day.

Speaker, through you to the minister, can he please inform the House what our government is doing to support the hard-working nurses in Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member from Scarborough—Agincourt for this important question. I'd like to once again recognize the nurses that we have with us today here in the gallery and say yet again on behalf of all of us: Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To the Chair, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also say how it's so important to hear from our outstanding health care providers in Ontario. We did this, you'll recall, with Ebola. We listened to our front-line health care workers, particularly our nurses. Through their expertise and their good advice, we were much, much better prepared as a result.

Nurses are, in so many ways, the ears and the eyes of our health care system, so our government values the hard work that they do here in Ontario every day. Let me say again, Mr. Speaker, on my own behalf and also on behalf of Ontarians: Thank you. Thank you for the work. Thank you for your commitment. Thank you for making Ontario a better place.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're on two.

Again, a reminder to speak to the Chair.

Supplementary.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to thank the minister for his dedication to nurses in Ontario. Recently, our govern-

ment has expanded the nurse practitioners' scope of practices, enabling them to improve patient care by providing services, such as admitting and discharging patients from hospitals, ordering laboratory tests and prescribing medications, as well as giving nurse practitioners the ability to refer patients directly to a specialist.

We know that nurse practitioners are advanced-practice nurses who are well trained, experienced and competent. The expansion of their scope of practice enables nurse practitioners working in the Hong Fook nurse practitioner clinic in my riding of Scarborough—Agin-court, and across the province, to deliver timely, quality primary care in the hospital, community and long-term-care facilities. This is extremely exciting for both the nurses in Ontario and for our patients, providing faster access to the right care in the various health care settings.

Speaker, through you to the minister, can he please inform the House how many more nurses are working in the province since 2003?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member from Scarborough—Agin-court is absolutely right when she is talking about the expanding nursing scope of practice. I would like to reaffirm our commitment as a government to RN prescribing to this House.

Mr. Speaker, our government's investments have helped to ensure that there is a stable nursing workforce now and for the future. Since our taking office in 2003, over 24,000 more nurses and over 10,800 more RNs are working in our health care system. According to the College of Nurses of Ontario, in 2015 there were 719 more nurses working in Ontario hospitals than in the previous year. These numbers, of course, don't account for the nurses employed outside of hospitals or in home and community care.

Our government, importantly, has also increased the number of nurses working full-time since 2003 by a full 30%. Through our government's investments in nursing, we're not only ensuring a stable workforce, but Ontarians are receiving the best possible care.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, to the Premier: Yesterday, I spoke about the crisis of domestic violence gripping rural Ontario and the tragic consequences that resulted because of this government's failure to take action on this tragic problem. Yesterday, the Premier stated she would not be taking any lessons from me in relation to domestic violence facing rural women.

Speaker, what is it exactly that the Premier believes—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Etobicoke North, come to order.

Finish, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: What is it exactly that the Premier believes disqualifies me from speaking on this issue? Is it because I'm a man? A husband? A brother to my sisters?

A father to my daughter? A grandfather of four? Is it my three terms—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay, again.

You have time to wrap up.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Or is it my three terms as an MPP, representing all issues and all concerns? What exactly is it that this Premier believes disqualifies me and justifies her arrogant, condescending dismissal of me raising the government's failure—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Premier?

1120

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will speak to what we have been doing to address the issue of violence against women. I'm very pleased when anyone in this House raises this issue. I'm especially pleased when people find a renewed interest or a newfound interest in an issue, and this is one that is very, very important.

It's important to all of us: It's important to men; it's important to women; it's important to our whole community that everyone in our society feels safe, that we have the supports in place. So our sexual violence action plan, It's Never Okay, speaks to that. It speaks to that commitment.

I said yesterday that we recognize that there's a deep misogyny throughout our society. I don't think there's anyone who can deny that, in every aspect of society, misogyny has been part of the way men and women interact with each other. We have to eradicate that, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yesterday, the Premier said she would not be taking lessons from me, and she won't answer that question today. This government is failing rural women and their families from keeping them safe and providing adequate support and resources.

Yesterday, she mentioned the \$100 million, and I believe that's a fantastic step in the right direction. However, it does nothing to address those same failings for rural women and their families.

The thoughts on my inability to contribute to productive dialogue by the Premier are not something shared by her caucus or cabinet colleagues. Both the Attorney General and the minister for public safety and corrections have agreed to meet face to face with me to discuss these failings and to find solutions.

Speaker, will the Premier have an epiphany today? Is it in her nature to set aside her ideological differences and condescending attitude and work with me to help vulnerable women and their families—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Withdraw.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Don't test. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You know, this is actually an issue that is way, way too important to all of us in society to let it devolve into either a partisan or an acrimonious debate. The fact is, there are women who are being killed; there are women who are living in violent situations. It is our responsibility to do something about that. That's why we introduced our sexual assault and violence plan.

Mr. Speaker, I'm 62 years old. My whole life, from the time I started kindergarten as the eldest of four girls, I have tackled—in my own little way, when I was five years old, and throughout my life—the assumptions about what women can or cannot do. I have done it in elementary school. I did it in high school. I've done it throughout my professional career. I'll continue to do it, Mr. Speaker.

It is about all of us. The member opposite is right: It is about every single one of us. But the fact is, we know that the more women we have in positions of leadership, like all the members here, the more we are going to tackle these issues of deep-rooted misogyny that have been with us for centuries.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: "Apologize" is not a word in your vocabulary. You've got an opportunity to apologize now.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You have an opportunity to not interrupt when I'm standing.

New question.

MUSIC INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Last year's budget claimed that the Ontario Music Fund had created or retained 2,000 jobs in the first year alone. The minister subsequently told Billboard magazine that in the first year, the fund had been responsible for the creation of 2,000 new jobs. That's new jobs.

But as is often the case with this government, the evidence sings a very different tune. The Ontario Media Development Corp.'s own statistics show that just 263 new full-time jobs were created by the fund and another 569 retained. That's one quarter of the 2,000 claimed.

Could the minister explain the jarring disharmony between the government's claims and its reported facts?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Yesterday I had the opportunity to talk a little bit about the culture sector here in the province of Ontario. It's a \$22-billion sector, and of course music is a big part of that sector.

We as a government put forward a new fund, the Ontario Music Fund, to allow for different artists here in

the province of Ontario, different companies and labels to really accelerate the work they're doing. We see this as an economic development piece, and we know the music sector here in Ontario is creating thousands of jobs. They always have, and we're seeing an increased acceleration of jobs here in the province of Ontario. We're seeing music that's being used now in our video games and interactive digital media, music that's being used in our film, in our television. This is part of a huge sector that continues to grow.

I hope that the members opposite support the culture sector and the music fund, because we see it as a huge opportunity for continued economic growth here in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: No answer again.

In last year's budget, the Ontario Music Fund was established on a permanent basis while the Ontario Sound Recording Tax Credit was discontinued. The Ontario independent music industry expressed its concern that the change in the support model from tax credits to a grant-based regime would unduly favour large multinational record labels at the expense of small Ontario producers.

The data bears out this concern. Ontario record companies were awarded grants averaging \$115,000 each in the fund's first year, and \$144,000 in the fund's second year, but the three large foreign record labels, Sony, Universal and Warner, received \$5 million between them over the last two years.

Could the minister explain why the Ontario taxpayers are subsidizing big multinationals at six to seven times the rate of our own domestic producers? And will today's budget do a better job of protecting our own independent music industry in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Coteau: The Ontario Music Fund is a fund that we are very proud of as a government. It's a \$15-million fund that last year we made permanent. This is a permanent fund embedded into our budget. When you have other provinces like British Columbia copying our fund in order to accelerate their sector, I think that's a vote of confidence on our side.

But let me tell you a little bit of a story, Mr. Speaker. The Weeknd, an international superstar from Scarborough, Ontario: When he first started, he accessed the music fund to help build his career. And look at him now; the guy just won a Grammy. I think we should stand up for our artists here in the province of Ontario and stand up for the music fund because it will allow for this sector to continue to grow.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Start the clock.

New question.

NORTHERN TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. On Sunday, January 10, at approx-

imately 3 p.m., the Nipigon River Bridge was closed to travellers due to safety concerns. We were all pleased to see MTO staff work quickly and decisively that day. I know that we are thankful that no one was hurt during this incident.

This is an absolutely crucial section of the transportation network in northwestern Ontario, linking east and west. I know the MTO crews have been working very hard to restore traffic to two lanes. Can the minister please provide members of this House with the latest information on the reopening of the Nipigon River Bridge?

1130

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member from Sudbury for this question and for his ongoing advocacy on behalf of his riding and all of northern Ontario.

I also want to take a very quick moment to pay tribute to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, who showed extremely strong local leadership within hours of this incident occurring back in January. I also want to thank the municipalities, First Nations communities and all of those travelling Highway 11/17 for their patience and understanding as we've taken the necessary steps to bring the Nipigon River Bridge back to full service.

As Minister of Transportation, my number one priority is the safety of all those using the roads and highways in this province. That's why I'm extremely pleased to announce that the Nipigon River Bridge has reopened as of 10 o'clock this morning.

Again, I want to thank the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. I want to thank the member from Sudbury and our other members from northern Ontario.

We will continue to make crucial investments in highway expansions across northern Ontario and in all forms of infrastructure right across this province. I encourage all to pay close attention to this afternoon's budget, in which I'm sure the Minister of Finance will continue to outline our plans to build Ontario up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: I also want to thank the Minister of Transportation for his response. I know that many northerners will be relieved to hear that the Nipigon River Bridge has reopened. This bridge is being constructed as a component of the expansion of Highway 11/17, between Nipigon and Thunder Bay, and it is just one example of the investments that our government is making in northern Ontario.

As the member for Sudbury, I know that my constituents are glad to have a government that is willing to make those investments that truly count for northerners. So, can the Minister of Northern Development and Mines please tell members of this House what our government is doing to support northern roads and bridges?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks so much to the member for Sudbury for the question. I sure am pleased to have an opportunity to thank my colleague the Minis-

ter of Transportation and certainly the hard-working staff in his ministry for their dedication to ensuring that the reopened Nipigon River Bridge is safe and available to travellers across the north. May I say: Minister Del Duca was in touch with me immediately after the incident on January 10. In fact, I think we spoke at great length twice, and even Premier Wynne spoke to me as well.

Minister Del Duca has remained very accessible and responsive not only to me as the local member but with the communities impacted, ensuring up-to-the-minute information was publicly available. So we are very pleased that indeed the two lanes are open, and we look forward to seeing the results of the investigation.

This very much ties into our commitment to northern highway infrastructure: \$5 billion over the last 10 years in terms of northern highway rehabilitation and expansion. Again, we look forward to good news in the budget.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is actually to the Premier. She boasts about open government, transparency and accountability, but the facts compared to the spin are quite astonishing, Speaker. You just have to look at the deletions in the gas plant scandal or at the leaked budget documents we received over a year ago.

Now, today, her government will table a budget almost a month earlier than previously scheduled and without the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs reporting on the extensive pre-budget consultations held throughout Ontario. They're making a mockery out of public consultation to the people who actually care about what happens in this assembly.

Can the Premier explain to me, to my colleagues and to all of those across Ontario who spent time and valuable resources on their presentations, why her government is ignoring them?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Just before we move, I'd like to remind the government House leader and all members that we do not reference anyone's attendance in this place.

Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I should point out to the member who has this great concern about consultation that, first of all, you're always demanding on the other side that we have an earlier budget than a later budget. Now you've changed your mind on that.

But I want to point out that the government has collected more than 2,700 ideas from thousands of Ontarians through nine weeks of engaging with Ontarians in person, online, in writing and by telephone; 20 in-person consultations in 12 cities; and heard from over 700 people. For the second year in a row we launched budget talks where over 6,500 Ontarians registered as users. That information has been very valuable as we continue this process, and those who voice their opinions will have

those opinions taken into full account, and you will see that they've been reflected—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'd actually like to go back to the Premier, as much as I respect the deputy government House leader. The reality is that there were consultations that took place, formal consultations for this assembly. The committee responsible for those pre-budget consultations hasn't even written their report, so you are basically and effectively acknowledging that this is a scam.

I want to go back. You talk a lot about stretch goals, aspirational budget, revenue tools—all buzzwords like “openness,” “accountability” and “transparency.” The Premier may want to sit over there and laugh at the opposition. She may want to laugh and thumb her nose at the public, who can no longer afford her high-tax budget increases like we just saw.

Let's talk about the Premier, in the last election, campaigning against a gas tax and then, just this week, implementing one. They do one thing after they say they'll do another. It's a pattern of behaviour that I've seen over the past 13 years: winning at all costs, and the public be damned.

My question back to the Premier: Will you admit the public interest isn't your interest anymore?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I will gently caution the member in the use of certain language that was used. I was listening carefully and it was right on the border. If it gets used again, I will have to call it within a withdrawal.

Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: First of all, I should correct the member. No one over here is laughing at those circumstances. When people have a smile on their face, it's not an assumption immediately that they're laughing at anything that's coming from the opposition. I certainly would never laugh at anything the member from Nepean has to say in this House at all.

I want to say first of all that the Minister of Finance invited members of the committee, including both finance critics, to meet to discuss what issues have been raised at the committee. The minister also attended the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to join them for an open discussion. That's the first appearance I can remember before the committee since 2005.

The committee also provided the government with 124 documents, and those documents are on the consultations. So the committee was monitored very carefully by the Ministry of Finance, and all of the opinions heard will be taken into consideration.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Good morning, Minister.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Good morning.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, we all know we are in crisis in this province when it comes to the availability of safe and affordable housing. We all know there are 80,000 people in Toronto on a waiting list, among the 170,000 people in line across the province. Minister, the waiting list in Windsor is now at 3,000. Some of these good folks have been waiting seven years for safe and affordable housing.

Speaker, would the minister agree that this is disgraceful and that it's time this government did something about it?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: This minister would agree that it's time we did something about it, and I'm pleased to share a little bit about what's happening in that regard. One of the first things that I did as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was to pull together an expert panel on homelessness, which the member opposite—thank you for the question, by the way—is aware of.

We're also working very hard on developing a new and updated Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, which I anticipate will be released in the next couple of weeks.

I can also say: It's not just Windsor and Toronto. Sudbury has the highest waiting list it's had in years, and other municipalities as well. Our partners at the municipal level are raising the issue, as I am raising it with caucus and cabinet, and I'm looking forward to some assistance. I'm looking forward to some assistance, perhaps from our—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Supplementary?

1140

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Windsor is at the top of the unemployment rate in Ontario. Small shelters which were serving 20 meals a day are now providing 200. Food banks are busier than ever before. Without housing, people can't look for employment. We're better off than in some places in the province because we have 8,700 affordable housing units, but they need more than \$60 million in upgrades.

When is this government going to take seriously the crisis in safe and affordable housing in Windsor and right across this province?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We announced just about 10 days ago an infusion of \$92 million to assist with rehabilitation of housing units. I could reference the largest contribution of any Ontario government in history—I won't do that—in terms of affordable housing or the number of units we've helped create—I won't do that—or the number of people we've helped stay in homes. It's a serious problem. It's one that needs serious attention, and it's going to get that attention from this minister and, I'm hoping, our government.

The other piece of good news—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chair, please.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: The stars are lining up. There are still some clouds in the sky which we need to move. For the first time in recent history, we have a federal government that's committed to working with the prov-

ince and municipalities to develop a national housing strategy and to make sure that the homes out there that are in need of a retrofit—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN

Mr. Yvan Baker: My question is to the Associate Minister of Finance. Since being elected to represent my riding of Etobicoke Centre, I've heard about a range of issues from my constituents. One of the issues that I hear about a lot is the need to strengthen retirement security.

As a young person, I probably don't think enough about this issue, but I have heard from young people in my community and, more often than not, I also hear from seniors whom I represent who hope that the next generation, their children and grandchildren, will be able to enjoy the retirement security that they deserve and retire comfortably. That's why I'm proud of the leadership that our Premier has shown, not just in Ontario but across Canada, in advocating for enhancements to retirement security, not just here in Ontario but across the country.

Minister, as you know I also have a business background. I've spoken to you and your staff on a number of occasions to relay what I've heard from businesses, some of whom have expressed questions and concerns about the economic impact of the ORPP and the impact on business.

Last session, I was so pleased, Minister, when you committed to conduct a cost-benefit analysis to study the economic impact of the ORPP. Could you share with us what the analysis uncovered?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank very much the terrific member from Etobicoke Centre for this important question.

Last December, our government fulfilled its legislative commitment and tabled a cost-benefit analysis of the ORPP. This independent analysis was conducted by the Conference Board of Canada. The findings are clear: Accounting for all factors, the analysis shows that Ontarians and the economy will be better off under the ORPP. The report found that the ORPP will have a long-term positive impact on Ontario's economy. When factoring in reductions in EI and WSIB premiums, disposable income will be \$63.3 billion higher than the base case for Ontario's economy. The GDP will be \$62.7 billion higher than the base case scenario, as lower management fees associated with the ORPP will save middle-income individuals upwards of 43%.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Premier concerning domestic violence. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, March 1, at 6 p.m.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In the Speaker's gallery today, we have a guest from the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Please join me in welcoming the youngest-ever MLA, Thomas Dang, the member from Edmonton-South West.

The member from Barrie on a point of order.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I didn't get a chance earlier, but I'd like to welcome Barrie constituent Rebecca Harbridge, who is here today with RNAO.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1145 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to introduce Saad Haider, from the riding of Mississauga-Brampton South, who is here to participate in the model Parliament. As well, Izabela Szczytynski is here today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RAY DESJARDINS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Each day we have a few minutes dedicated to this assembly for each of our caucuses to talk about important people in their constituencies. I think it is a shining example of how we can bring the stories of incredible people from our constituencies into the public record of Ontario.

That is what I want to do today with Mr. Raymond Desjardins, from the Barrhaven Legion. Ray is going to turn 75 years old on Saturday, and he has been a great friend to me and to many others across the community as he has championed the inception of the Barrhaven Legion—one of Canada's most successful Legions—which began its institutional history in Nepean just 10 years ago.

Ray is the padre of our Legion, and he has presided over many difficult passages and circumstances in our community, always fighting for the veterans who've served our community, but going one step further by being a very important supporter of the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre, and ensuring that all of those from our community in Nepean-Carleton are treated with dignity and respect.

He has been part of food and toy drives, he has been part of the annual Christmas-stocking filling at the Perley Rideau, and it is for all of these wonderful contributions that he was awarded the Order of Ottawa by the city of Ottawa. And he is a Knight Commander of the Order of St. George.

On behalf of all of his friends in Nepean-Carleton, but more importantly, all of those people whom Ray has volunteered for and has given so much to, I want to say happy birthday to him on his very special day.

DON EDE

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's with a heavy heart that I rise today to talk about the loss of an icon in my riding, Mr. Don Ede.

Don was the guy in Chippawa who was involved in everything and knew everyone. He and his wife, Carol, volunteered with countless organizations, including the Willoughby Historical Society, the Village of Chippawa Citizens Committee, the Niagara Falls Battle of Chippawa, and so many, many more.

Don and his wife were recently inducted into the Niagara Falls Arts and Culture Wall of Fame.

Whether you knew him from his days as a champion pigeon racer—or the friends he had coffee with every morning in the Chippawa Tim Hortons, or a person who came to see his collection of historic items from the village of Chippawa, or someone who got a Chippawa green card from him, everyone loved Don. They loved him so much that they even called him Mr. Chippawa, a name he proudly put on his licence plate to go with his Chippawa, Ontario, car window sticker.

Today would have been Don's 79th birthday, to be exact, and on this day I'm sure that wherever he is, he knows that his friends, his family and his community will miss him dearly.

I met Don during the first campaign I ever ran, and he stood by me every campaign after. I can honestly say that without Don's support and his incredible friendship, I wouldn't be standing here today to give this statement. For over 15 years, Don had been my dedicated and loyal friend, and I know I will never stop missing him.

I want to send my condolences to Don's family—his wife, Carol, who unfortunately couldn't be here today; his daughters, Darlene and Rebecca; his grandchildren, Marshall, Sarah and Jack—and to everyone else who cannot begin to imagine what Chippawa and Niagara will be without Don Ede.

So long Mr. Chippawa, and thank you for being my friend.

MODEL PARLIAMENT

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise today to speak about the third annual model Parliament, a three-day educational program designed for grades 10 to 12 students who are interested in current events and provincial issues. This unique educational experience brings together 107 students from across Ontario, representing each of the province's ridings in Toronto.

The model Parliament is an excellent forum for our youth to gain a stronger insight and knowledge of our province's parliamentary practices and traditions, while participating in an authentic experience that will teach them the value and importance of our democratic process.

Tomorrow, the participants of the model Parliament will be doing a mock debate in this legislative chamber. I look forward to attending this debate, as I know it will be lively and engaging.

Last night, I had an opportunity to meet many of the student participants attending the 2016 model Parliament, including my constituent Anna Wang, a grade 11 student at Dr. Norman Bethune Collegiate. She is from the great riding of Scarborough—Agincourt. She is a highly respected young activist recognized by her peers, and she works hard on social and global issues.

I know the students in the 2016 model Parliament will forge new friendships and will acquire a new appreciation about how decisions are being made here in the Legislature, and will become active citizens.

I want to thank all the staff at the Legislature for organizing the third annual model Parliament.

LIFE SCIENCES ONTARIO AWARDS

Mr. Michael Harris: Last night I had the pleasure to attend the Life Sciences Ontario annual awards gala.

Life Sciences Ontario is a member-driven organization that represents and promotes the province's vibrant and diverse life sciences sector. Here are highlights of some of the awards presented last night:

A Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Murray McLaughlin, the executive director of Bioindustrial Innovation Canada. This award recognized his leadership in commercializing biotechnologies and growing innovation-based companies.

The LSO Volunteer Award was presented to Jason Locklin, who is a long-standing member of the LSO board and whose advocacy and enthusiasm for the life sciences emanates in his roles on many committees and initiatives for LSO.

Finally, the Life Sciences Leadership Award was given to David Allan, a board member of Formation Biologics. I met David in my office back in December on the LSO lobby day. Saying that David is passionate about furthering the life sciences industry is merely an understatement. He zealously champions the need for public policy to foster and promote the same high tolerance for capital investment in life sciences which Canadian investors practise in other industries. David advocates for the adjustment of fiscal obstacles to life sciences capital, and I must stress that I agree with David on this point.

There is more to be done in the life sciences sector in Ontario, and as the critic for research and innovation, it is my goal to do all that I can to advocate and promote for the needs of organizations such as LSO.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Paul Miller: It isn't too often that we find a subject on which both labour and management agree, where union and non-union workers are on the same page; yet, with the release of the Dean review on the Ontario College of Trades, there appears to be a strong collective voice from many in the construction industry.

While the Dean review contains many positive elements, there is concern that the government is moving too quickly on some of the recommendations—recom-

mendations that could have a profound impact on the construction industry in our province.

I'll remind members that, when the college was set up, the objective was to allow the construction industry to regulate itself through an independent, self-financing body. Now, with some of the recommendations in the Dean review, it appears that the government is changing their original basis for the college.

Earlier this week, I met with members of the Progressive Certified Trades Coalition, who are holding meetings to explain the impact of the Dean review on health and safety, apprenticeships and public safety. I hope all members have an opportunity to chat with them, to learn more about these important issues and to ensure that the government holds detailed and inclusive consultations before implementing the recommendations of the Dean review.

AL GREEN

Mr. Mike Colle: Today I want to give tribute to Mr. Toronto, Al Green. Al Green basically built this city. He built over 100,000 suburban homes and apartments. He built commercial units. Where you see concentration near the subways at Davisville and Yonge, down at Bloor and Sherbourne, and all over the city—Al Green had a vision of people living near public transit, so where the subway went, Al built.

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Al started on Major Street, just a bit west of here. He, his father, Lipa, and his brother Harold started by sweeping chimneys, then they started repairing chimneys, then they started building houses, and then they started to build this city.

Al Green not only built the city, but he built the arts in the city. He gave millions away in philanthropy to the arts, to sculpture. He also created the Al Green Resource Centre for adults with learning challenges. Mr. Al Green also created the Al Green Theatre, the Al Green Gallery and the Lipa Green Centre for Jewish Community Services.

Al Green was everywhere. Everywhere in this city, you will see a city that Al Green built. When you look at Toronto, you're really looking at Al Green's dream.

We're going to miss you, Al. You did so much to build this great city. We will always remember the building that you did with your own bare hands. Long live Al Green.

VOLUNTEERS IN HURON-BRUCE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to say today that what is uniting us amongst all parties today is our reflections on remarkable citizens. I'm going to be following suit, because earlier this year, I was honoured to welcome to the Teeswater town hall 13 remarkable volunteers from across Huron-Bruce who have worked selflessly to make their communities more vibrant.

The evening was one of recognition and celebration. As one reporter for the Walkerton Herald-Times said,

"This was, without any understatement, one of the most inspiring events I've ever attended."

The remarkable people who were recognized that evening have truly been quiet champions for their communities, just getting the job done, and honestly an inspiration to their many neighbours, friends and family members who were there in attendance that evening. Whether it had been working for a new community soccer pitch, serving children nutritious food at school or ensuring people living with disabilities are immersed in our communities, these remarkable Huron-Bruce citizens have dedicated their time and energy to making their communities better for those around them.

That is why today I say thank you and congratulations to Jeff Roberts of Walkerton, Bob Kellington of Brussels, Cathy Pennington of Kincardine, Vicky Culbert of Goderich, Don Farrell of Ripley, Dr. Chandra Tripathi from Kincardine, Heather Frook of Brockton, James Rice of Tiverton, Roger Lewington of Bayfield, Jean Culliton of Teeswater, Jennie Rowe of Exeter, Clarence Kieffer of Walkerton and Diane Lieber of Goderich, formerly South Bruce. Thank you for all you've done for your communities.

REFUGEES

Mr. Granville Anderson: I am glad to rise today to welcome the first Syrian refugee family to Scugog. They arrived last week on their trip from Jordan to Montreal and then to Scugog, with the help of the Port Perry Refugee Support Group. Of course, they happened to arrive on the coldest day of the year so far, but I know that the residents of Scugog generously came forward with mittens and winter gear for them.

I want to acknowledge the residents of Durham for their kindness in welcoming this family, and they're preparing to welcome several more. I know the residents of Durham value a diverse and inclusive community and are eager to offer their hospitality and to share our vibrant community with those who need our help the most.

Thank you to the constituents of Durham and to the Port Perry Refugee Support Group.

REFUGEES

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: On January 17, I was pleased to join over 100 residents of Burlington in a five-kilometre walk to support the resettlement of a Syrian refugee family in our community. This walk was organized by Olivia Walker-Edwards, a grade 9 student from Burlington's Blyth Academy.

What started out as a school assignment turned into an event that brought out the best in our neighbours and united our community. Working in partnership with the Burlington Downtown Refugee Alliance, a coalition spearheaded by St. Luke's Anglican Church and made up of faith-based groups, community organizations, city hall staff, local businesses and Burlington residents, Olivia

helped to raise over \$5,000 to support a privately sponsored Syrian family.

Olivia's efforts to make this walk happen are proof that one person, no matter what their age, can make a difference in the lives of others. From speaking to young people in our city, including those on my youth advisory committee, I know that these young people have a great deal of empathy for the children who are building a new life here in Canada. Olivia embodies this empathy.

When I asked her why she chose to do this walk, here's what she said: "I organized this walk because we have all been touched by the images we have seen of the children and families fleeing Syria.

"I wanted to do something to help and to make a difference.

"Since the walk, I have learned that the family we are expecting is very similar to my own—a family of six with two girls and two boys—which makes the walk even more meaningful to me.

"I look forward to meeting them," she continued, "and to sharing the success of the walk with them. I hope this will make them feel welcome and supported by their new community."

I'd like to congratulate Olivia, and thank her and all the students at Blyth Academy, as well as the Burlington Downtown Refugee Alliance, not only for this great event but for their continued efforts to resettle Syrian families in our community.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change on a point of order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the latitude I hope you'll give me. I would like to welcome, on behalf of the member from Mississauga—Erindale, the great students from Erindale high school. Welcome. It's great to have you here today. That's in the west gallery.

Behind me, in the east gallery, are the students from our model Parliament, who are students of our craft, for some reason. We wish them well and hope that they enjoy their stay here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, and welcome to both groups.

I also want to pick up on the member from Huron—Bruce's comment. I don't know if I should be doing this, because I could be testing myself, but today's statements were exactly what we were looking for, and I appreciate complying with that.

Interjection: I always listen to you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): But you listened carefully when I said I don't want to jinx it, so let's see what happens.

APPOINTMENT OF TEMPORARY OMBUDSMAN

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table order in

council 316/2016, dated February 24, 2016, reappointing Barbara Finlay as the temporary Ombudsman for the province of Ontario until March 31, 2016.

APPOINTMENT OF OMBUDSMAN

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I also have today laid upon the table order in council 317/2016, dated February 24, 2016, appointing Paul Dubé as the Ombudsman for the province of Ontario commencing April 1, 2016.

PETITIONS

ELDER ABUSE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas today, there are more seniors 65 and over than children under the age of 15, both in Ontario and across Canada;

"Whereas there are currently more than two million seniors aged 65 and over—approximately 15% of the population and this number is expected to double in the next 25 years;

"Whereas Elder Abuse Ontario stated that between 40,000 and 200,000 seniors living in Ontario experienced or are experiencing elder abuse;

"Whereas research showed that abuse against seniors takes many forms and is often perpetrated by family members;

"Whereas financial and emotional abuse are the most frequently reported elder abuse cases;

"Whereas current Ontario legislation incorporates the Residents' Bill of Rights, mandates abuse prevention, investigation and reporting of seniors living in either long-term-care facilities or retirement homes;

"Whereas the majority of the seniors currently and in the future live in the community;

"Whereas Bill 148, if passed, will ensure seniors living in the community have the same protection and support as those seniors living in long-term-care facilities and retirement homes;

"Whereas Bill 148, if passed, will require regulated health professionals to report elder abuse or neglect to the public guardian and trustee office;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Ontario Legislative Assembly pass Bill 148, An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992 and the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, requiring health professionals to report any reasonable suspicion that a senior living in the community is being abused or neglected to the public guardian and trustee office."

I fully support the petition and I give my petition to Richard.

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LUNG HEALTH

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children and youth living with asthma;

“Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

“In the Ontario Lung Association report, *Your Lungs, Your Life*, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To allow for deputations on ... private member’s bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

“Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41 ... through the committee,” through “third ... reading; and to ... royal assent....”

I agree with this, affix my name and give it to Sayeem.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Michael Harris: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I agree with this, sign it and will send it down with page Owen.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I support the petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Suzanne.

CAREGIVERS

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I do have some petitions here that I’m going to present on behalf of the member from Peterborough, Minister Leal, and I will read them.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are over 2.6 million caregivers to a family member, a friend or a neighbour in Ontario;

“Whereas these caregivers work hard to provide care to those that are most in need even though their efforts are often overlooked;

“Whereas one third of informal caregivers are distressed, which is twice as many as four years ago;

“Whereas without these caregivers, the health care system and patients would greatly suffer in Ontario;

“Therefore” be it resolved that “we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP Gélinas’s bill to proclaim the first Tuesday of every April as Family Caregiver Day to increase recognition and awareness of family caregivers in Ontario.”

I will sign this petition and send it to the desk.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital is challenged to support the growing needs of the community within its existing space as it was built for a mere 7,000 visits and experiences in excess of 33,000 visits annually” in its emergency department; and

“Whereas the government-implemented Places to Grow Act forecasts massive population growth in New Tecumseth” and the hospital catchment area, “which along with the aging population will only intensify the need for the redevelopment of the hospital; and

"Whereas all other hospital emergency facilities are more than 45 minutes away with no public transit available between those communities; and

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital deserves equitable servicing comparable to other Ontario hospitals;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government immediately provide the necessary funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital for the redevelopment of their emergency department, operating rooms, diagnostic imaging and laboratory to ensure that they can continue to provide stable and ongoing service to residents in our area."

Of course, I agree with the petition, and I will sign it.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Wayne Gates: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Privatizing Hydro One: Another Wrong Choice.

"Whereas once you privatize hydro, there's no return; and

"We'll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

"We'll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

"We'll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what's happened elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come"—for our young kids up at the top there.

LUNG HEALTH

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children and youth living with asthma;

"Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

"In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry's private member's bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and

Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

"Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage."

I support this petition, I sign it and I give it to page Micah.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Soliris for patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome (aHUS), an ultra-rare, chronic and life-threatening genetic condition that progressively damages vital organs, leading to heart attack, stroke and kidney failure; and

"Whereas Soliris, the first and only pharmaceutical treatment in Canada for the treatment of aHUS, has allowed patients to discontinue plasma and dialysis therapies, and has been shown to improve kidney function and enable successful kidney transplant; and

"Whereas the lack of public funding for Soliris is especially burdensome on the families of Ontario children and adults battling this catastrophic disease;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Instruct the Ontario government to immediately provide Soliris as a choice to patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature and send it to the desk with Bianca.

LUNG HEALTH

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I've got another petition here. These are from people concerned about lung health, from the St. Catharines area. It's a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children and youth living with asthma;

"Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

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"In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To allow for deputations on ... private member's bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

"Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41" through to royal assent.

Thank you, Speaker. I agree with it and affix my signature—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Further petitions?

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the price of electricity has skyrocketed under the Ontario Liberal government;

"Whereas ever-higher hydro bills are a huge concern for everyone in the province, especially seniors and others on fixed incomes, who can't afford to pay more;

"Whereas Ontario's businesses say high electricity costs are making them uncompetitive, and have contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs;

"Whereas the recent Auditor General's report found Ontarians overpaid for electricity by \$37 billion over the past eight years and estimates that we will overpay by an additional \$133 billion over the next 18 years if nothing changes;

"Whereas the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants costing \$1.1 billion, feed-in tariff (FIT) contracts with wind and solar companies, the sale of surplus energy to neighbouring jurisdictions at a loss, the debt retirement charge, the global adjustment and smart meters that haven't met their conservation targets have all put upward pressure on hydro bills;

"Whereas the sale of 60% of Hydro One is opposed by a majority of Ontarians and will likely only lead to even higher hydro bills;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To listen to Ontarians, reverse course on the Liberal government's current hydro policies and take immediate steps to stabilize hydro bills."

Mr. Speaker, I support this petition as well.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the residents of the municipality of Clarington have been promised that the GO train would be extended to Courtice and Bowmanville;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario keep its promise to Clarington residents and commit to providing the necessary funding for Metrolinx to complete the extension of the GO train to Courtice and Bowmanville no later than 2018."

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here, addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I agree with the petition, affix my name and give it to page Richard to bring to the table.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The time allocated for petitions has ended.

Therefore, pursuant to standing order 59(b), this House stands recessed until 4 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1335 to 1600.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2010 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2016

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the House to revert to introduction of bills.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Finance, try another thing.

Hon. Charles Sousa: This other page is a little bit better.

I move, seconded by Ms. Wynne, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Sousa has moved, seconded by Ms. Wynne, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

I would ask at this time that, as the pages deliver the copies of the budget, two things happen: that we clear the way and make sure that there is nothing in your aisles; and that we allow them enough time to deliver the budgets, and then we will proceed.

It is now time for the delivery of the budget.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And you thought Canadian curling was exciting.

I must check to see that all members have their copies. All members? Thank you.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the House to revert to introduction of bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Not yet.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Not yet? All right, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Do your speech.

Hon. Charles Sousa: All right.

Interjections.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I just want to get on with it. I'm sorry.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to present the 2016 Ontario budget. Before I begin, please join me in welcoming my wife, Zenny, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. We first met in junior kindergarten, in Kensington Market. She often reminds me of those humble beginnings, which inspire me—which inspires many—to do our best so that our kids can have an even greater opportunity. Mr. Speaker, those values are shared by most Ontarians and they're reflected in the pages of this document.

Monsieur le Président, j'ai l'honneur de déposer le budget de l'Ontario de 2016.

It's also an honour to extend particular thanks to my Deputy Minister of Finance, Scott Thompson, and the Deputy Minister of Treasury Board Secretariat, Greg Orenesak, and their teams.

My sincere gratitude goes to all the people at the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board for a job well done. As well, Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend our great political staff and colleagues in this House for their long hours and exceptional teamwork in helping create a plan designed to grow our economy and create jobs. Thank you, to everyone.

Mr. Speaker, as anyone who's been through the budget process knows, it's not glamorous.

But I know two things about our Ontario public servants:

First, they know that serving the people of Ontario is a privilege.

And second, there's nothing they would rather do.

Mr. Speaker, we expect nothing less in Ontario.

Because that tremendous work ethic ... that same spirit ...

Lives in homes and businesses right across our province.

Ontarians not only work hard ... we work smart.

And we look at the challenges ahead of us ... and overcome them.

We size up the opportunities ... and seize them.

It's what we do.

It's why our families came here ... whether a century ago ...

Or decades ago ... like mine ...

Or weeks ago ... like refugees fleeing Syria ...

People from around the world choose to live in Ontario ...

Because they know that in Ontario ...

What was true yesterday is still true today:

There is room for everyone.

Room for everyone to compete and do business.

Room to learn.

And, above all, room to help each other.

And I believe ... no matter which side of this House we sit on ...

We can all agree that what Ontario needs ... is jobs for today ...

And jobs for tomorrow.

During the last global recession, we launched a multi-year plan to protect jobs ... invest in schools, hospitals, roads and transit ...

A plan that manages expenses and that strengthens our economy.

We did this, while building an Ontario that is every bit as compassionate ...

As it is competitive.

We knew that we had to control expenses, manage spending, find savings ...

And make the necessary investments to move Ontario forward ...

To protect and create more jobs.

And all the while, chipping away ...

Patiently ...

Day in and day out ...

At the deficit.

At the same time, we also chose to keep supporting valuable services ...

Like health care and education ... that provide for our families and keep us competitive.

Mr. Speaker, there are other choices we could have made ...

Some wanted us to cut vital services drastically across the board ...

But that would have hurt the very services Ontarians needed most ... at the moment they most needed them.

Instead of cutting ... we built ... Mr. Speaker.
We kept people working and we built for the long term.

We built hospitals ... and schools ...

We built roads ... and transit.

And we built an education system second to none.

Today ... students from full-day kindergarten to college, university and apprenticeships are getting ready for today's jobs and tomorrow's opportunities.

All of us ... as Ontarians ... have been creating those opportunities, together.

Since 2009, our businesses and entrepreneurs have helped create more than 600,000 net new jobs.

The vast majority of these have been full-time and high-paying jobs in the private sector.

And Ontario is getting ready to create an additional 320,000 jobs over the next 36 months.

Mr. Speaker, that would bring Ontario's total job creation to well over 900,000 in just 10 years.

That is more jobs than there are people in the sixth-largest city in Canada—my hometown of Mississauga.

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And there's more.

We've created a business and investment climate that is one of the most competitive in North America.

We're keeping our taxes competitive.

We've cut the marginal effective tax rate on new business investment in half.

And we're keeping that in place, too.

We've reduced the cost of doing business by eliminating regulatory red tape.

And we're going to do even more.

When people start a business in Ontario ... they know that their workers will be highly skilled and talented.

Those solid advantages, Mr. Speaker ... are important in an uncertain global economy.

Ontario's economy is projected to grow by 2.2% ...

Making us a leader in Canada in economic growth and job creation.

For the last two years, we have attracted more foreign direct investment than any other Canadian province or US state, creating full-time, high-paying jobs in the private sector for Ontarians.

We know from experience, however, that the global economy can turn very quickly.

Right now, uncertain economic winds are currently blowing in the right direction for Ontario.

A low dollar ...

Low oil prices ...

And steady US demand all favour Ontario exports.

However, we cannot simply trust that those fair economic winds will stay with us.

We must keep charting our own course.

So, we're staying the course, moving forward with our plan that is working to build jobs for today ... and jobs for tomorrow.

The plan is investing in infrastructure to be more competitive ...

It's about leading in a low-carbon economy driven by innovative, high-growth, export-oriented businesses.

The plan invests in people's talents and skills and their ability to get and create the jobs of tomorrow ...

By expanding access to college and university education.

The plan also helps all Ontarians ...

Achieve more.

The plan is also about helping more Ontarians achieve a more secure retirement.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we will keep building a more compassionate Ontario and a fair society ...

And stick to our plan of fiscal responsibility to eliminate the deficit by next year ... in 2017-18.

Mr. Speaker ... we launched full-day kindergarten in 2010.

We said then that it was the best thing we could do to build a better, more competitive Ontario ...

Because we know that giving young minds a great start in those critical early years ...

Sets them on a path to success in the years that follow.

Mr. Speaker ... that first full-day kindergarten class is in grade 5 this year ...

And with each passing year ... our young people ... our children ...

Are learning new skills and gaining more confidence ...

Getting closer to postsecondary education and the workforce.

As every parent knows ... kids grow up fast.

One day, we're driving them everywhere by car ...

The next day, they're driving the car everywhere.

So it's time, Mr. Speaker ... that we look ahead to what our kids will do next.

We have to make sure that every child ... no matter what their family income ... has an opportunity to get a great start in life.

Next, we'll make sure that every student ... no matter what their family income ... has an opportunity to get a great job.

The kind of job you can only get with a postsecondary education.

We know that people who have a degree or diploma can expect to earn more than those who don't.

We also know that people from low-income families do not pursue a postsecondary education as much as others ...

Because they feel that it's beyond their reach.

And even though we have one of the highest attainment rates in the world ...

We need it to be higher to enhance Ontario's prosperity even more.

That is why we are taking steps to make post-secondary more affordable for more students.

We are transforming Ontario's student assistance so it becomes less complex and easier to access.

All students will continue to be as well as, or better off than, they are under the current Ontario Tuition Grant.

In fact, more than 50 per cent of students from families with incomes of \$83,000 or less will receive grants that are greater than the cost of average tuition.

Too often, most of the most vulnerable in our society don't pursue higher education due to the sticker shock of admission.

For college and university students who come from families with incomes of less than \$50,000, average tuition will be free.

Mr. Speaker, it gives us great pleasure to announce that these students will have no provincial student debt—students like Cormac McGee, who is in his fourth year of journalism studies at Ryerson University, and Megan Phillips, who is in her second year of medical office administration at George Brown College. Both are with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Please welcome them.

Our plan will also increase access and benefits to the middle class.

That means more young people ... will have greater education ...

And be better prepared to find work ...

With more opportunity to excel at attaining a higher quality of life for their families.

This is an investment in their future. It's an investment in our future.

Mr. Speaker ... there's also another investment we proudly make.

Our publicly funded, high-quality health care system is a great competitive advantage for Ontario ...

And it's also a source of comfort for our families.

For the last several years, Ontario has not only controlled growth in health care spending ...

We have led the way in keeping our strong health care on a sustainable path.

In 2016-17, we will increase funding for hospitals by \$345 million, including the first increase to hospital base budgets in five years, which will reduce wait times even further.

At the same time, we are maintaining our commitment to increase funding to home and community care ...

By \$250 million per year for the next two years.

Ontario is also planning to make the shingles vaccine available to eligible seniors aged 65 to 70 ...

Free of charge.

This will lower their costs by about \$170, to help make their everyday lives easier, as well as help reduce emergency visits and hospital stays.

This balanced approach allows Ontario to achieve greater progress ...

And protect high-quality, valued health care.

Mr. Speaker ...

We all have places we need to go, and we need to travel

Whether it's an early meeting at the start of the day ...

Or daycare at the end of the day.

Like so many, I'm a daily commuter ...

And I think I speak for all commuters when I say ...

We'd rather spend less time looking at those stick-figure families on those car windows ...

And more time with our own families.

That's why we are committing \$160 billion over 12 years ...

To public infrastructure.

That's a bigger commitment than what was made in our fall statement ...

And it's the biggest investment of its kind in our province's history.

Mr. Speaker, strategic infrastructure investments stimulate economic growth and create jobs.

Strategic infrastructure investments move people more quickly and safely ...

And strategic infrastructure investments move goods to market more competitively.

By Moving Ontario Forward, we are building GO regional express rail ...

Which will quadruple the number of trips from 1,500 to 6,000 a week.

Municipalities have told us that the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund ...

Is vital to help them build infrastructure that is critical for their communities to thrive and compete.

Mr. Speaker, these are smaller communities of less than 100,000, and also rural and northern communities.

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Hon. Jeff Leal: Small towns, big dreams.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Right.

I am pleased to share that we are increasing and expanding this fund to \$300 million per year by 2018-19 ...

Mr. Speaker, these are vital investments in jobs for today and jobs for tomorrow.

These are investments that keep Ontarians moving ...

These are investments to keep our economy growing.

Furthermore ... over 10 years ... we will invest \$11 billion to improve the condition of our schools.

And \$12 billion in hospital capital improvements.

Mr. Speaker, these record investments we are making in building roads, transit, schools and hospitals ...

Will create jobs today.

And sustain jobs for tomorrow ...

They will strengthen our province ... and improve quality of life for Ontario families.

Sourcing capital is also a key part of enabling these investments.

As you know, in November 2015, the province completed the initial public offering of Hydro One ...

It created strong investor demand and was well received by the marketplace.

We remain on track to generate \$5.7 billion ...

From maximizing the value of our assets ...

And, more importantly, from reinvesting those funds into transit and other projects across Ontario ...

To create even more valuable assets and even greater returns.

Mr. Speaker ... although today's global economic climate continues to be uncertain ...

The forecast for Ontario is stronger than in other regions.

Last month, TD Bank reported that Ontario can expect solid economic growth in 2016 ...

Fuelled by our strong manufacturing and exports.

We want to sustain that growth, Mr. Speaker ...

And build upon it.

We want to lead the world ... with a dynamic and innovative business environment.

That's why we're moving forward with the Business Growth Initiative outlined in last fall's economic statement.

This will support further innovation in Ontario's economy ...

It will help small and medium-sized businesses scale up, helping them become global leaders.

The Business Growth Initiative will help modernize the regulatory system and further reduce costs of doing business ...

One example is a new advanced manufacturing consortium involving three universities—Western in London, U of W in Waterloo and McMaster in Hamilton.

Applause.

Hon. Charles Sousa: They got a little bit ahead of me there, presidents. I'd like to highlight the presence of those three universities, who are also with us today in the gallery. Mr. Amit Chakma of Western, Mr. Feridun Hamdullahpur of Waterloo and Mr. Patrick Deane of McMaster, thank you for your partnership.

This partnership will work with businesses, manufacturers and industrial research projects ...

In making Ontario a leader in products like digital components and high-tech devices.

Ontario will lead. We have no doubt.

Mr. Speaker, the global fight against climate change presents new opportunities for Ontario's economy and jobs.

We all know that climate change already costs the people of Ontario. Let's not turn our backs on them.

We know that if left behind, those financial costs will only continue to rise over the coming years.

And we know that while climate change creates environmental challenges ...

Tackling those challenges also creates tremendous economic potential.

I am proud that Ontario has supported innovation to become a model for sustainable growth and prosperity.

Our people have shown leadership in areas like quantum research in the Perimeter Institute and biosciences in MaRS.

We cannot ... and will not ... sit idly by and wait for others to take action.

That's not the Ontario way.

It sounds new age, but it's been our tradition.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, many people may not know that North America's very first commercial oil well actually began in Ontario in 1858 ... in the village of Oil Springs in Lambton county.

Now, more than 150 years later ... we're leading again.

Ontario began transforming our carbon-based economy a decade ago ...

When we announced North America's single-largest greenhouse gas-reducing initiative ...

By closing down our coal-fired power plants.

Coal has gone from supplying a quarter of our electricity 10 years ago ... to none today.

I grew up next to the four sisters Lakeview coal plant.

In 2005, we had more than 50 smog days.

Since we closed the last of Ontario's coal plants in 2014, we've had zero—none.

Our people breathe easier ...

Our air is cleaner ...

Our electricity is greener ...

And others ... around the world ... are looking to our leadership in clean tech.

Because Ontario is home to more than a third of Canadian clean technology companies.

All of this means jobs for today ...

And jobs for tomorrow ...

Giving us a competitive advantage over places where they've chosen to put off their emissions reductions for another day—another smog day.

Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker ...

Our world ... our global economy ... is headed to lowering emissions and cleaner air.

There's an old saying, Mr. Speaker: We do not inherit the earth from our parents, we borrow it from our children. Mr. Speaker, our people, our children, are demanding that we be good stewards of the environment, as well as the economy.

Ontario was among the first to eliminate coal ...

Among the first to embrace clean tech ...

And we will be one of the first to take the next big step in environmental sustainability, innovation and economic growth.

That is why Ontario is moving forward with the proposed cap-and-trade program.

Under this program ... Ontario would cap the amount of greenhouse gas pollution that businesses and institutions can emit.

Companies could respond by investing in clean tech to become more efficient, burning fewer fossil fuels or buying additional carbon credits.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, all proceeds from the cap-and-trade program—up to \$1.9 billion annually ...

Will be invested exclusively in prescribed programs that reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions ...

To ensure clean air for our children and future generations to come.

As Ontario invests in growing the global low-carbon economy ...

We will reap the economic benefits ...

And Ontario's clean tech companies will thrive.

With our recently announced Green Investment Fund ...

Ontario will spur investment and innovation ...

To help provide solutions to large emitters that face barriers in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Speaker, these dedicated programs will ensure companies and households thrive during the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Cap-and-trade will create an even more dynamic and innovative business environment ...

With jobs for today ...

And jobs for tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker ... Ontario's plan ... also includes strengthening retirement security.

Let's give credit where credit is due.

Thanks to the vision and leadership of Premier Kathleen Wynne ...

The Ontario Retirement Pension Plan will help close the savings gap for millions of people who lack the security of a workplace pension.

And thanks to the hard work of our colleague Mitzie Hunter ...

We've been able to make the ORPP a major part of our economic plan.

We believe that every working Ontarian deserves a secure retirement.

We will enrol employers for the ORPP starting next January, as planned, and only start collecting contributions in January 2018.

Payments of benefits would still commence in 2022.

We are also working with the federal government and the other provinces ...

To look at ways to meet the goals of ORPP within an enhanced CPP framework.

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Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, our plan means more Ontarians will enjoy a more secure retirement, meaning Ontario's economy will be stronger.

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with our plan, Ontario continues to build a fair society.

It not only includes retirement income security, it includes overall income security.

This year's budget continues to improve the supports that lift people out of poverty.

We are directly addressing the impact of the changing labour market and helping our most vulnerable ...

And as such, we are increasing social assistance rates by 1.5% for people who receive Ontario Works ...

And people who rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that we will also join with researchers and select communities to develop a basic income pilot project.

And we are investing \$178 million over the next three years in our Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy to support the goal to end chronic homelessness ...

We're investing in affordable housing because everyone deserves a roof over their head.

We're undertaking new, progressive initiatives such as anti-racism and anti-violence, because it's never okay. We support a long-term strategy to end violence against indigenous women ...

Because everyone deserves to be safe.

Taking action on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada ...

Will improve social conditions and economic opportunities for First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples.

We've listened to Ontarians, Mr. Speaker—

Laughter.

Hon. Charles Sousa: —and it's important to note that this budget ...

Is the product of many open and extensive consultations ... with tens of thousands of people across our great province.

Some may laugh at that, but our interactive Budget Talks platform empowered people to submit, vote and comment in real time.

The leader of the NDP may not appreciate that, but there is one individual, Lyle Skidmore, who submitted an idea to put LED lighting on provincial highways, and he too joins us today in the Speaker's gallery. Where are you, Skid? There you are. Thank you.

His is but one of many ideas that are contained in this plan.

My colleagues on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs tell me that ...

At every single one of their hearings ...

They heard from family groups, community groups and health organizations ...

About what we need to do to help our most frail and elderly ...

Live with dignity ...

And about the need to improve palliative care, as well as end-of-life care.

So, in this budget, we're going to expand hospice care.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of this work has been spearheaded by one of the most compassionate Ontarians I know ...

Someone whose own personal experiences with his father's end-of-life care have inspired him to help others.

Thank you, MPP John Fraser.

Mr. Speaker ... a compassionate Ontario also means making everyday life easier for Ontario families.

We've taken steps to help auto insurance rates go down, not up.

And we will eliminate the \$30 fee for Drive Clean.

Mr. Speaker, we're eliminating the debt retirement charge and we're offering energy retrofits.

And we're lowering hospital parking fees.

Support to full-day kindergarten helps families manage their time and costs while giving our children a better start in life.

And, Mr. Speaker, we are offering more support for children with autism to help families receives IBI care more quickly and more frequently.

Education is being expanded with access to online learning through eCampus Ontario.

And, Mr. Speaker, we are also using technology to make it easier to use public services.

By 2018, people will be able to use an online service to renew their health cards, as an example.

Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, we have also increased choice and convenience by expanding the distribution of beer to grocery stores ...

And now we're expanding more choice of wine and cider on those shelves.

Monsieur le Président, nous avons demandé au gouvernement fédéral à maintes reprises d'agir à titre de partenaire motivé et actif pour créer un Ontario fort ...

Because Ontario remains at the heart of our Canadian economy.

Et nous avons toujours fait notre part pour nous assurer que notre province et notre pays demeurent forts.

It's also encouraging, Mr. Speaker, that Canada's new government in Ottawa ...

And our new Prime Minister, have shown interest and willingness to work with us to build Ontario's economy ...

And we look forward to continuing to strengthen that partnership.

Alors que le Canada fêtera ses 150 ans, notre province tiendra—Mr. Speaker, we are celebrating our 150th anniversary, the roots of our great country and the heritage that makes us who we are.

Nous allons explorer notre histoire et célébrer nos artistes locaux.

People will explore our history and also experience the diversity of our indigenous and francophone communities ...

And our many, many cultural communities as well, Mr. Speaker ...

And that makes Ontario great.

As I said earlier, Ontario's plan has been long in the making ...

We continue to chip away at the deficit ...

Now, we are in the home stretch.

Through hard work and discipline—

Interjections.

Hon. Charles Sousa: —and no thanks to the members opposite, Ontario remains the province with the lowest per capita program spending in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

Our net debt-to-GDP ratio—a key measure of fiscal performance ...

Is expected to peak at 39.6% in 2015-16 ... then level off.

It will improve in 2017-18 and track towards our goal of 27%.

Our plan represents a balance between making strategic investments and managing expenses.

The results reflect the hard work of Deputy Premier Deb Matthews and our Treasury Board team as we continually examine how every taxpayer dollar is spent ...

Line by line ...

To focus on improving outcomes that support key public services relied on by families and to ensure maximum value for taxpayers on government programs and services.

This has helped improve Ontario's performance and the fiscal plan.

Mr. Speaker, our plan is working.

We are now projecting a deficit of \$5.7 billion in 2015-16 ...

Reduced further to \$4.3 billion in 2016-17.

Mr. Speaker, this will be the last deficit before we erase it completely in 2017-18.

We are balancing the budget.

Mr. Speaker ...

Ontario has a lot to be proud of.

Our natural environment ...

Our quality of life ...

Our great cities ...

Our countryside.

We grow and produce some of the world's greatest food ...

Brew great beer and make amazing wine.

Our high tech and clean tech industries are leading the way for the rest of the world ...

Our banks are some of the world's strongest and most reliable institutions ...

For hundreds of years ... the products mined and made and farmed in Ontario ... the discoveries uncovered here ... have done more than just bring us wealth and prosperity ...

They've improved the lives of millions of people around the world.

We have much to be proud of.

And most of all ... our single greatest resource ...

The best edge we have in a globally competitive economy has always been ...

And will always be ... our people.

So our government remains committed ... above all ... to our people.

To ensure each of us has what we need to compete and win ...

And more than that ...

We have what it takes ... to build a bright future.

Bright people who create jobs today ... and jobs tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The opposition House leader and member from Simcoe-Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Wilson has moved adjournment of the debate. Do we agree? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I would ask the House to revert to introduction of bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So ordered.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**JOBS FOR TODAY
AND TOMORROW ACT (BUDGET
MEASURES), 2016****LOI DE 2016 FAVORISANT LA CRÉATION
D'EMPLOIS POUR AUJOURD'HUI
ET DEMAIN (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)**

Mr. Sousa moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact or amend various statutes / Projet de loi 173, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter ou à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister for a short statement.

Hon. Charles Sousa: No, thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Do we agree? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until Monday at 10:30.

The House adjourned at 1644.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, William Short

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Brown, Patrick (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cookville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
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Glenn Thibeault
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Monday 29 February 2016

Lundi 29 février 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 29 February 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 29 février 2016

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm really excited to have, from my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Darryl Boersma and Tim Arends in the House today. Welcome.

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to welcome the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance here today. Their members are Lyndon Stewart, Helene St. Jacques, Joanne Hickey-Evans, Quinton Woods, Mary Fragedakis, Steve Crawford, Bill Hodgson, Dana McCauley, Kevin Turbell, Colin Best, Stacey Jebb and Janet Horner. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me recognize Councillor Avia Eek from ward 6, township of King, a farmer in the Holland Marsh and part of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance here today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Toby Barrett: As you know, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance are here today: Kathy Macpherson, Peter Lambrick, Lia Lappano, Nancy Rutherford, Sue Todd, Ken Lamb, Jamie Cox, Sonia Dhir, Rosemary MacLellan, Olga Pawluczyk, Doug Van Luyk and Jamie Draves. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'd like to introduce a few members from Waterloo region this morning who are representing the Council of Ontario Construction Associations: Martha George, Jeff Kienapple, Wes Quickfall and Ted Dreyer. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I want to welcome, from COCA today, Jeff Koller, Dan Lancia, Jodi Travers and Ian Cunningham. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to welcome many students who are here today from the Canadian Black Caucus. The Canadian Black Caucus is a non-partisan organization that seeks to promote civic engagement by inspiring youth to engage in the political process. Welcome to them, each and every one.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'm not sure if they're here today or not, but just a shout-out to the Krista McCarville rink from Thunder Bay, which came within one point of winning the Scotties national championship last night, losing to Alberta in the 10th end, as I understand it. So, a shout-out to Krista McCarville and her rink from Thunder Bay.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I would like to welcome Jim Lyons and Matthew Todd from the Windsor Construction Association. They're here, and I'll be meeting with them later on. Welcome.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to introduce representatives from the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance: Robert Pasuta, who is my councillor from Hamilton; Joanna Downey; Eric Acs; Nancy Gaffney; John Hambly; Allan Thompson; Avia Eek; Ben Roberts; Nancy Rutherford; Gerald Kellington; Tom Wilson; Michael Wolfson; Michael Barrett; and Suzanne van Bommel. They'll be here for a gathering later today. Welcome, all.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome a few people for the COCA reception this afternoon, as well, who have joined us for question period: Martin Benson, Suzanne Fitch and Ian Cunningham from the Council of Ontario Construction Associations.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to introduce members of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, who are having a lunch meeting today in room 230, as well as their evening reception in the dining room at 5 p.m.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: On behalf of my colleague the Honourable Jim Bradley, MPP for St. Catharines, it gives me great pleasure to introduce page captain Sarah Mateus-Jimenez and her mother, Lilianna Maria Jimenez-Delgado, who is here in our gallery today. Welcome.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders—or CORD, as they're known—to Queen's Park. CORD will be hosting a reception in the Side Bar Room downstairs, beside the legislative dining room, after question period today. I invite all members of this House to join their reception.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure today to introduce my husband, Joseph Varner, and my daughter, Victoria Ann MacLeod-Varner. They are not actually in the gallery; they're in my office, and she probably has her headset on, but I just wanted to introduce them today anyway.

M. Michael Mantha: Ça me fait grand plaisir d'introduire un ami de jeunesse, M. Denis Shank, le président de l'Association de la construction de Sudbury. Bienvenue, mon ami.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to welcome Peter Lambrick, who is here this morning as part of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance. Peter is also a director of the Ontario farming association.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: There are three constituents here today. I'm not sure if they're in the House yet. Lisa Jibson is here, Suzanne van Bommel was announced earlier, and—I think it's free for me to say, because he's not in the House—former MPP Steve Peters is in the House today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, he's not in the House, so I get to bypass that one.

The member from Durham?

Mr. Granville Anderson: Speaker, I would like to welcome Nancy Rutherford, manager of agriculture and rural affairs at the region of Durham.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Mr. Speaker, I'll beg your indulgence for a quick moment. This isn't technically the introduction of a visitor who's here in the building, but I did want to introduce my newest nephew, the newest addition to our family, who was born to my brother Michael and my sister-in-law Amanda at 1:50 a.m., very early this morning, just down the street, at Mount Sinai. He's seven pounds, eight ounces, and his name is Alexander Henry Del Duca. Welcome to the world.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On behalf of my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton, I'd like to welcome the family of Tristan Bhola, page captain this morning: mother, Patricia Bhikam Bhola; father, Rudy Bhola; sister Davinia Bhola; and brothers Nicholas and Harry Bhola. They will be in the public gallery this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

WEARING OF SCARVES

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear scarves in recognition of Rare Disease Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Labour is seeking unanimous consent to wear scarves in recognition of Rare Disease Day. Do we agree? Agreed.

For clarification purposes: Have they been distributed to each gallery?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, they will be distributed. I think the member from North Bay will really like these scarves.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. They just arrived.

1040

ORAL QUESTIONS

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

The Liberals continue to claim they will eventually balance the budget, but their numbers simply don't add up. The budget projects \$4 billion more in revenue than the Financial Accountability Officer said is possible. The

Liberals project \$4 billion more in revenue than the FAO's best-case scenario.

Mr. Speaker, a simple question: Whose numbers are correct—the Premier's or the Financial Accountability Officer's?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Finance is going to want to comment on the deficit reduction.

The fact is that we are on track to eliminate our deficit by 2017-18. We've beaten our deficit targets for the seventh year in a row, and we'll be balancing the budget next year, in 2017-18, which is the target that we've put in place. We are meeting that target.

Mr. Speaker, the budget is about the investments in this province. It's about the investments in students who are going to have more access to post-secondary education because of the changes we're making on tuition. Our budget is about putting in place a cap-and-trade system that is going to fight greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change. That's about economic growth, innovation and the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: It's all smoke and mirrors. The Liberals accuse the Financial Accountability Officer of being wrong, but their shell game has already started. The Liberals are moving money around to lower their deficit this year. How? The Liberals raided the contingency fund. They took \$850 million of money that was meant for Ontario's rainy day. Mr. Speaker, that money is supposed to protect Ontario if we have another recession.

Why is the Premier using Ontario's rainy day fund to temporarily fudge the bottom line?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the investments that we're making in this budget.

As I said, we are on track to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. We've overachieved on our targets every year for seven years, and the deficit will be eliminated next year—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): This is just the subtle start. If I have to go further, I will.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let's talk about what we've done, Mr. Speaker, in terms of investment in infrastructure. We're in our third year of a \$160-billion investment, which is creating 110,000 jobs a year.

We're increasing health care funding—that's one of the things that the Leader of the Opposition was talking about before the budget; I assume he supports it now—including \$345 million a year for hospital funding. That's something, again, that he was looking for.

We're lowering hospital parking fees.

We're improving services for children and youth with autism, a \$330-million investment over five years. That's something that we heard about during the budget consultations, and that will help children all over the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The numbers don't lie. The Liberal shell game to reduce the deficit is just that.

For the last two years, the Liberals have said that the Hydro One fire sale is going to pay for infrastructure. How many times have we heard that? This budget proves otherwise. The Liberals have reduced the deficit by applying a \$2.6-billion one-time departure tax from the sale of Hydro One and using another \$1.1 billion of revenue from the Hydro One fire sale. Mr. Speaker, it is a shell game.

Will the Premier finally come clean? Is the Hydro One fire sale going for infrastructure or is it paying for your years of mismanagement, waste and scandal? Yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm standing. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, there's one thing that the member opposite did get right: The numbers do matter. And what matters here is that we are achieving our results, we're exceeding our targets, we're growing the economy and we're balancing the books. When he made reference to the fact that numbers don't lie—that's exactly what's in this budget.

The Conference Board of Canada and others have made very clear that the budget is one of the most transparent with the highest integrity. We've laid out very clearly in this budget where it's going, how it's being affected and how we're coming to balance while investing in the things that matter to the people of Ontario. I'm very proud of this budget, very proud of the people of Ontario who make it happen.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. No one believes this government. This government has no credibility. This government's idea of an affordable energy plan is offering \$2 a month in energy rebates—\$2 a month—the same day they announced \$387 in increased costs. Premier, are you kidding me? How do you possibly think this makes sense?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Through the Chair, please. To the Chair, please.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let's just talk about what people are saying about the budget. Gabrielle Ross-Marquette of the Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario said students “have a lot to celebrate today with this commitment to fairness, equity and justice for students,” particularly those from low-income families.

Let's see what Spencer Nestico-Semianiw, president of OUSA, the Ontario university students' association, said: “These are sweeping improvements that will

dramatically improve financial aid for our students. Students will receive more grants, and for many of them, tuition will be free.”

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I hear the heckling from the other side that it's a percentage of students. Yes, Mr. Speaker, it's low-income students. It's students who don't have access to post-secondary. Those are the students who will most benefit from the changes that we're making.

The Ontario Pharmacists Association: “Ontario's pharmacists have long advocated for equitable access to needed”—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: No one believes this government. I can't say that more clearly. We know the health tax did not go to health care. Hospitals are at their brink, nurses are being cut, and doctors are closing their practices. Smart meters were supposed to lower energy costs. They certainly didn't save a cent.

Mr. Speaker, given this government's record, why should anyone believe their cap-and-trade will actually fight emissions and won't simply become another ugly Liberal slush fund?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, come to order. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite obviously looks at the budget and looks at the changes we're making, particularly on cap-and-trade—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —which is, remember, a strategy to deal with climate change, to deal with the fact that we are living in an environment that has been changed by humankind. It is being altered in ways that are going to degrade the economy or are already degrading the economy.

There's an article this morning about the effects on the north. You only have to sit with colleagues from across the country, particularly from the north, to understand that the way of life in terms of ice roads and the ability to get supplies into the north has been completely changed because of climate change.

It is our responsibility to take action. That's what we're doing. That's what cap-and-trade is. We will make it a transparent system—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: Ontario families and seniors will not be fooled; they will not be tricked. Nothing in this budget gives without taking away from something else. Hospitals get a

1% increase, but this government took away \$107 million in gaming revenue that was previously targeted to hospitals. Some seniors get a free vaccine, but then the Liberals nearly double the cost of all other medications. You offer students a tuition grant, but you take away their tax credit.

Mr. Speaker, why is this Premier robbing Peter to pay Paul?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let's talk about the supports we're putting in place for seniors, just to take that part of the question: an additional \$250 million to expand capacity to deliver high-quality home and community care; and \$75 million over three years in community-based residential hospice and palliative care.

In fact, the member's colleague from Nipissing, PC MPP Vic Fedeli, actually said, "I was really pleased to see the hospice money come through. We have a hospice in North Bay and it's such a huge need. When I saw that, I thought that was excellent."

So, in fact, there are supports being put in place for people across this province, every corner of this province and every age group. I think the Leader of the Opposition needs to look at the budget as a totality.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

New question. The leader of the third party.

1050

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Does the Premier really believe, as has been reported, that a senior earning \$19,500 a year is affluent?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say to the leader of the third party that the objective of the change in the budget was to ensure that fewer Ontario seniors have to pay any annual deductible on their prescription drugs. That was the intention.

We want to make sure that we got it right for other seniors as well, though, and I understand that. We're going to look carefully at this regulation that is out for consultation, and if we didn't get it right, then we will make a change in terms of that threshold.

I would say to the leader of the third party that I would ask her to work with us. The objective was to make sure that more seniors had free access to prescription medication. If we didn't get that threshold right, we will correct that in the process of the consultation on the regulation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A single senior living on \$19,500 a year in a city like Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Kingston or London isn't rich, but they will see their drug costs nearly double. Can this Premier explain why she's nearly doubling drug costs for seniors across Ontario, including seniors living on less than \$19,500 a year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the leader of the third party had the second question written before I answered, but I hope that she understands that in answer

to her first question I said that there were 170,000 more seniors who will have access to free prescription medication. That was the intention: to make sure that more seniors had that access.

If, in the consultation on the regulation, we determine that we didn't get that threshold right—and I think what the leader of the third party is saying is that she doesn't think we did. If we can find some consensus on that, and we need to change that threshold, we will change it. I hope the leader of the third party understands that is our intention as the consultation is ongoing.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This Premier put out a budget threatening seniors with nearly doubling their drug costs, and now she's trying to back away from that. This Premier did not consult with seniors at all prior to putting that piece of information out there in the budget. New Democrats do listen to seniors across this province, and do you know what they're telling us? They can't pay the bills. They can't pay their hydro bill. They can't keep the lights on. They can't keep their homes heated and their apartments heated. This callous Premier is about to double their drug costs. She is out of touch. She needs to dial this back and do the right thing by the seniors of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I assume, because as I have listened to seniors as well across the province, as has the leader of the third party, that she would understand that 170,000 more seniors having access to free prescription medication would be a good thing. That's in our budget. I don't know if she missed that part, but that is in our budget. That was the intention of the change that we made.

We are also increasing funding to palliative care. We are increasing funding in terms of the shingles vaccine so that it will no longer cost any senior—and I don't know what the Leader of the Opposition was talking about when he was talking about some seniors, but any senior—it will not cost them \$170 to get that vaccine now. We have made those changes: the 170,000 more seniors who will have access to free medication. I heard that too. That's why it's in there. If we didn't get the threshold right on the other part of the change, then we will change that.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Communities are seeing their neighbourhood schools closed. Kids who need special supports are seeing those supports cut. Students are having to wear winter jackets in their classrooms because there isn't money to fix the heaters.

Can this Premier explain to students, their parents and their educators why it is that she's cutting another \$430 million from education this year and over a billion dollars since 2014?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, in fact, in the budget, the leader of the third party will notice that we are increasing funding to education by \$350 million.

One of the very important things that we are doing is, we are putting \$333 million more into autism funding. Children with autism are some of the most vulnerable in society, in our province. Making sure that we increase funding and that we do it in a way that allows those kids to get access to the treatment that they need early, when it makes a difference to them—that's why that \$333 million is extremely important.

On top of that, we continue with the investments in capital: \$11 billion in the education system over the next 10 years.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the budget cuts \$430 million out of education, but that's not all. The Premier is cutting \$1.2 billion out of other programs, but there are no details about what those other programs might be, what services people might be losing. Is it road safety? Is it food inspections? Is it water safety? Exactly what is that \$1.2 billion coming from, and how many people are going to lose their jobs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm delighted that you asked about this because, in fact, we spent \$325 million more on renewal last year than the previous year, but what happened as a result of that was that school boards spent more money on more big projects. Do you know what happens, Speaker? What happens is, if you spend on a project over \$10,000, it's counted as capital and it's counted over 25 years. So yes, it looks like the spending went down, but in fact there were more big projects—\$325 million more worth of big projects.

Of course, the other reason that the spending went down is that we don't pay people who go on strike. We didn't project a strike. We didn't pay the people who went on strike.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, on page 256 of the budget, Ontarians will see, when they look—because they can go online and look at the budget—regardless of what these ministers and this Premier says, \$1.5 billion in cuts: \$430 million cut from education, \$50 million cut from colleges and universities, and \$1.2 billion slashed out of just about everything else.

Cuts like this hurt people. They hurt young people. They hurt seniors. They hurt parents. They hurt people in cities, in rural Ontario, in the north, in the south.

What the Premier doesn't seem to get is that people are counting on public services, and the Premier is failing—failing—at providing Ontarians with their most basic needs.

Will this Premier start listening to Ontarians and take the cuts out of her budget?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I would ask, please, that the leader of the third party go and look at the actual projections in the budget, because what the budget quite clearly says is that the spending on child care, elementary and secondary education is increasing on an average of 1.2% per year. It isn't being cut; it's going up every year. We are managing our costs, but it is going up every year, Speaker, just like the spending for health care, just like the spending in all the other areas of our budget. It's moderate growth—not dramatic growth, but moderate growth—and that's how we're going to come to balance: by careful, moderate growth that does a better job of educating our students so more students are graduating than ever before in Ontario.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier.

In 2014, the Auditor General warned that Liberal mismanagement of our finances is “crowding out” the services we need in Ontario. Because they did absolutely nothing about it, the auditor repeated herself almost word for word in the 2015 report.

And now we see from the 2016 budget that life in Ontario has gotten even more expensive. This is because of the cancellation of the children's tax credit, the cancellation of the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit and almost doubling the cost of drugs for most seniors—all because of 13 years of Liberal waste, mismanagement and scandal.

1100

Speaker, my question to the Premier is: Why are the Liberals balancing the books on the backs of children, families and seniors?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question from the opposition critic. I hope he takes—in the supplementary, recognizing what we have done to increase support for seniors, to increase support for our children, to increase support for tuition so that more of those most vulnerable have an opportunity to go to post-secondary, to increase support for hospitals and health care by \$1 billion year over year, all of which is enabling everybody to be at their best, including social programs.

At the same time, we're investing heavily in infrastructure, investing heavily to stimulate economic growth. With our measures that we are taking, we are also balancing the books. In the end, Ontarians expect us to manage prudently while still ensuring that we support the services that are so valuable to all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: We believe that this budget was a real opportunity for the government to show the people of Ontario that they were listening. All parties travelled throughout Ontario, all read the hundreds of letters and all heard about the pain people are feeling under this government. Families warned that they can no longer make their hydro payments.

Steve and Sheryl Ciglen from Trout Creek said that their hydro bill was \$904.23 last month, even though they

were away for a whole week and their furnace was off for five days because of a power outage. They're small business folks, ready to hire another person, but now they can't, because not only did this budget not help them with their hydro bill; it brought more costs to their business.

I ask the Premier: What do you say to the Ciglens, who see only higher costs for their family?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite made reference to consultations. Of course, it was the first time the Minister of Finance actually invited members of the finance committee to appear and have a discussion on these matters.

We all did consultations across the province over 20 cities, and I was very proud of the work that everyone did. They said, "No, why don't you come to meet with us?" I did, and I thank the member opposite for sending his email memorandum to that committee to advise us of, "Don't make any cuts. Oh, furthermore, spend more." And then he goes on to say, "You know what? Don't increase revenues. Oh, yeah, and balance the books."

I don't have the luxury, as finance minister, to live in their fiscal fantasyland. I live in the hard currency of reality, to balance the books and to ensure that we do what's necessary for the people of Ontario. That's what we are doing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask for a little bit of civility—and a reminder that we in this House mention only the person's riding or their title. Let's raise respect.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Minister of Finance. It's interesting that the 2016 budget is called Jobs For Today and Tomorrow. What this government fails to realize is that people are actually seeing fewer jobs today and, according to this government's budget, fewer jobs tomorrow, across Ontario.

For the second year in a row, this government has failed to meet its job creation goals by more than 60,000 jobs. If the government had listened to the people of this province during the pre-budget consultations instead of undermining the process, they would have heard that Ontarians are struggling. And no, I'm not referring to the Premier's well-connected friends; I'm talking about the rest of Ontario, who are having a harder time making ends meet and finding good-paying, permanent jobs.

Minister, what do you say to the Ontarians who feel that this Liberal government has left them behind once again?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Let me clarify some things for the finance critic from the NDP. Ontario and Ontarians have produced 608,000 net new jobs since the depths of the recession. Ontarians are continuing to work hard, and

320,000 additional jobs are being achieved over the next 36 months, all of which are primarily full-time, high-paying and in the private sector. I compliment the tremendous amount of work that's being done by the people of Ontario.

We did listen, Mr. Speaker. We went across the province as well. In fact, I compliment the member opposite who actually provided some tangible ideas as to what we should do in this budget, which we included. In fact, one of the direct fundings we need, that attendant at SCOFEA said, is \$3 billion more for bio-industrial innovation, and we put that on page 10.

There was an additional request for pregnancy and infant loss supports, and we put that in the budget as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Just before I commence, I've already noticed that some members have been advised that hanging the scarves over their desks is not conducive to our place. If you just fold them and put them on your desk or put them on, that would be appreciated. Thank you.

Supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Minister, it's almost like you're talking about a different budget, and perhaps it's because Mr. Clark probably wrote this budget. Everyone in Ontario knows that this is a stretch-goal budget.

During the pre-budget consultations—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order, please. I'm standing, first of all. Second of all, let's just stop.

Please finish.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Speaker, everyone in Ontario knows that this is a stretch-goal budget. During the pre-budget consultations, it became crystal clear to New Democrats that this government doesn't understand the priorities of Ontarians. Why else would a government fail to provide Ontarians with better health care, better jobs and a stronger education system? Why else would a government sell off a revenue-generating asset like Hydro One and leave Ontarians stuck footing the bill? It just doesn't add up.

Minister, when will this government stand up for Ontarians and get the fundamentals right?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The numbers speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker. We do aspire to do more and to do better for the people of Ontario. That, I agree. In fact, we agree to be fair in the determinations of the work we do. We continue to support tuition and our education by increasing funding. We're supporting our seniors and our health care by increasing funding there as well.

Mr. Speaker, we all went through the province. I reflected very seriously on the submissions made to SCOFEA. Their priorities and their values are very much reflected in this budget, and I am very proud of that.

One of their requests was, "Ensure that you continue to invest in our future. Ensure that you don't leave anybody behind." We're investing \$160 billion over the next 12 years to support infrastructure and the needs of

all communities across Ontario, some of it with permanent funding so that those municipalities can plan as well.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Han Dong: My question is also to the Minister of Finance. Minister, last Thursday our government tabled the 2016 Ontario budget, Jobs for Today and Tomorrow. The reviews are in. Stakeholders from each corner of the province and from every sector are applauding our government's plan.

The constituents in my riding of Trinity–Spadina have already told me about their excitement in our government's solid approach to growing the economy and creating jobs, especially the students of the University of Toronto and OCAD University.

It is now clear to all that we will be balancing our budget by the year 2017-18. Can the Minister of Finance please tell us more about this historic budget?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'd like to thank the member from Trinity–Spadina for his question and for participating today in a major announcement about supporting more jobs.

Mr. Speaker, our government's number one priority is growing the economy and creating jobs. Our economic plan supports good jobs today in communities across Ontario by investing in infrastructure and in a low-carbon economy by innovative, high-growth, export-oriented businesses.

The plan also helps all Ontarians achieve more security. Ontarians are worried about the state of the economy. We understand that, and that's why we've taken measures in this budget to ensure how it might affect them and their families. That's why we have tabled a budget that invests in jobs for today and tomorrow. That's because our biggest advantage is our people.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Han Dong: I want to thank the minister for his answer. What a great job on the budget.

Minister, you're quite right that Ontario's best attribute is its people, and they know that our plan will make their everyday lives easier. Minister, there are a number of key investments that we are making in this budget, and I know that this House would like to hear more about what we are doing. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Finance please inform this House about our plan to continue to create jobs for today and tomorrow?

1110

Hon. Charles Sousa: I thank the member for the awesome question and great reflection on the value of this budget. I know that my colleagues will want to speak about specifics, but I'm happy to outline the things I am most proud of in this budget. Over the weekend, a major newspaper's headline said that this budget says and reflects that there's "room for everyone."

It's so true, Mr. Speaker: by transforming student assistance to make average college and university tuition free for students with financial need from families of

incomes of less than \$50,000; by taking action on climate change and investing all proceeds from cap-and-trade into green projects; by making the biggest investment in infrastructure in Ontario's history—\$160 billion over 12 years starting in 2014-15; and by making everyday life easier for people across the province by lowering costs and enhancing convenience and choice, we're in this together for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

SENIORS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. For decades, Ontario's seniors have worked hard to make our province great. But now, thanks to the Liberal budget, their retirement years are becoming completely unaffordable.

Will the minister please explain what the Liberals have against the seniors of this province?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I want to thank the member for that question; I knew it would be coming, but I didn't know when. I'm really delighted to answer the question with respect to our seniors. We have done so much, not only in this budget, Speaker, but previous to this budget. Whatever we had been doing for the seniors prior to this will continue after the benefits our seniors are receiving in this new budget.

As never before, no one has done more than the previous and existing governments when it comes to benefits for our seniors, Speaker. And I will add more, with respect to individual benefits that our seniors are receiving now and will continue to receive afterwards.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Mr. Speaker, I received a letter from a retired couple. They had to sell their home because they could no longer afford the Liberal cost of living. The cost of hydro is going up, food is going up and now the government is piling on higher gas taxes at home and at the pumps. What are seniors getting out of it? Nothing new for long-term-care beds. Nothing new for seniors' physiotherapy. At the same time, they're making it more expensive for seniors to buy their medication.

My question is this: When the Minister of Finance said he was increasing seniors' drug benefit deductibles by 70%, where was the minister for seniors? Why didn't he speak up when he had the chance?

Hon. Mario Sergio: This is what our seniors' benefits are now. I'm going to give them individually so the member will know, and for the benefit of every member of this House:

- \$500 savings for the Ontario property tax grant;
- up to \$1,100.31 for the Ontario energy tax credit;
- \$287 for the Ontario Sales Tax Credit;
- \$1,500 for their home renovation tax;
- over 65, \$3,800 in free drugs;
- 10% savings on hydro bills; and
- 173,000 people are not paying \$100 co-payments after this new budget.

What else can we do for the seniors, Speaker? We can do even more: 173,000 don't pay over \$100, but we have also increased the age bracket where the seniors are getting drug benefits.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Years of frozen hospital budgets have had severe consequences for health care in Ontario. Today, patients face long wait times in ERs and cancelled surgeries, or they get admitted into hallways. Beds have been closed, hospital services moved to private clinics and 1,200 registered nurses have been cut in just over a year.

Now, for the seventh straight year in a row, hospital funding falls way below inflation. A 1% increase won't cover the cost of population growth or aging. It won't fix the damage that the Liberals have done to our hospitals and it won't stop even more cuts to front-line care.

How can the minister defend another year of cuts to our hospital care that families rely on?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm not even sure how to begin to answer that question, because to suggest that an extra \$1 billion into our health care system, \$345 million new for our hospitals—which is a 2.1% increase, actually. It's more than the rate of inflation.

I was just at an announcement with the finance minister this morning at University Health Network. We were surrounded by patients, advocates, health care workers, Anthony Dale from the Ontario Hospital Association, and Peter Pisters, the head of University Health Network, as well, to celebrate this significant investment in our front-line health care workers in the hospital system.

So how she somehow manages to twist that good news announcement into something else—I just am flabbergasted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The 1% increase to the budget of our hospitals will do nothing to cut wait times, and he knows it. It will do nothing to improve access. It will do nothing to open any new beds or re-hire the full-time nurses who lost their jobs. Nothing to stop the layoffs at hospitals in Windsor, Hamilton, North Bay—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please finish.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The damage that has been done by the layoffs in hospitals like Windsor, Hamilton, North Bay and so many other communities—and it's not just us saying this. Nurses and physicians know that a 1% increase to our hospitals will mean more cuts coming this year. St. Joe's Healthcare in Hamilton says the Liberals' budget changes nothing. There is still a need to cut \$26 million and they still need to lay off 136 workers.

People want to know: Why is this Liberal government doing so little to fix the years of damage that they have done to Ontario hospitals?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario is thrilled with Premier Wynne's and Minister Hoskins' commitment to nurse practitioners.

The RPNAO, as well, the registered practical nurses, were encouraged to note some of the much-needed health care investments outlined in the 2016 provincial budget.

It's not just the \$1 billion of new money in health care overall. It's the \$12 billion over the next decade for new and improved hospitals, \$50 million more in annual funding to assist hospitals in maintaining their facilities in good repair and, of course, \$85 million for our community health centres and for our family health teams to invest in our nurse practitioners and other allied health professionals, and \$75 million over the next three years on top of the existing funding for a total of \$155 million over three years for hospices, which is something I'm sure she's heard a lot from her constituents about in terms of the importance of all of these investments.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, post-secondary education is a big investment for Ontario families. Many students in Scarborough–Rouge River heavily rely on the Ontario student aid program to cover the costs of their post-secondary tuition. I understand that more than 380,000—more than half of all full-time students—received financial aid last year alone.

Many of my constituents were very happy about the many changes our government made to OSAP in last year's budget. I was particularly pleased to see that, as part of this year's budget, we are once again making monumental changes to the way student financial aid is delivered in Ontario.

Minister, can you please inform the members of the House how our government is making post-secondary education more affordable and accessible for students across Ontario in the 2016 budget?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Scarborough–Rouge River for that very timely question.

Our government strongly believes that all students, regardless of background or circumstances, should be able to afford to go to college or university in Ontario. That's why, as part of our 2016 budget, Ontario is moving forward with the single largest modernization of OSAP ever.

1120

We listened to student leaders and we are responding by combining existing assistance programs into a single, upfront grant that is more generous and more straightforward.

The new Ontario Student Grant is transformative. I am pleased to say that the new grant will make tuition free for low-income students in the province of Ontario. It will also ensure that mature students, married students and students who have been out of high school for more than four years will have access to this grant.

The Ontario Student Grant—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you to the minister for that answer. It is reassuring to hear that our government continues to keep the best interests of Ontario students in mind at all times.

Minister, despite the significant improvements the province has made to student aid since 2003, there remains a direct correlation between family income levels and post-secondary education participation rates. I understand that the rates of participation in full-time post-secondary education increase with family income. Furthermore, because of the complexity of how OSAP is structured and delivered, many students and families do not have a clear understanding of how much financial aid is available to them. This has led to the perception that Ontario has the highest tuition in Canada.

Minister, can you please tell us more about how the new Ontario Student Grant will help more students access post-secondary education and understand how much financial aid they can receive?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member for that question.

Our government is working hard to break down the barriers that are preventing Ontarians from getting a post-secondary education. That's why, by September 2017, all college, university and career college students who come from families with incomes of less than \$50,000 will have no provincial tuition debt. Not only that, the majority of students whose parents earn \$83,000 or less will also receive grants more than the cost of tuition.

Mr. Speaker, under the new Ontario Student Grant, more than 125,000 students will have more non-repayable aid, and approximately 250,000, or 80% of OSAP-eligible students, will have less debt than they would have under the current OSAP system. Not only is this a smart policy that will support economic growth; it is the right thing to do.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is to the environment minister.

No one believes the government's projections on cap-and-trade. We all know that the Liberals' cap-and-tax scheme will force Ontarians to pay much higher prices, much more than the Premier is willing to admit. In fact, long-term projections show that Ontario families can expect to pay nearly \$900 more every year just for gasoline and home heating alone. This Liberal scheme is just another example of how this government is making life more unaffordable for all Ontarians.

The minister had the chance to come clean with Ontarians last Thursday, but he chose not to. Why won't this minister tell the truth and finally reveal the true costs of the Liberals'—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's pretty fascinating watching the opposition on this. They have no position on climate change. They won't acknowledge that over half of the global GDP, half of the world's economy right

now, has a carbon price. They won't acknowledge that right now in British Columbia and Quebec the cost of living is going up at a slower rate than any other province and the Canadian average since they were the first to introduce a carbon tax. They won't acknowledge those simple facts.

I'm trying to figure out what their position is. It's a mixture of climate deniers and climate ditherers. They sort of tell you they care about climate change, but when it comes to actually telling us what they're going to do—we're about to put \$1.9 billion a year into people's heating systems, their cooling systems, their cars and their public transit to lower their cost of living.

What is the opposition going to do, other than dither?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I could tell you what the opposition is going to do, Speaker: We're going to put these guys to the door in 2018 and we're going to tell the truth.

Again, back to the minister: By next year alone, the government's own numbers show that each household in the province can, at least, pay nearly \$400 more every year—again, that's just for gas and home heating—and that still doesn't account for the long-term cost impact on families, which could more than double that number.

The truth is that the government's cap-and-tax scheme will increase the costs on everything, and what is it going to do? It will leave families, who are already struggling to make ends meet, with much higher prices for everyday essentials like groceries.

Speaker, why won't this minister finally admit that this government's real motive for cap-and-trade is to pay for years of Liberal scandal and mismanagement and not to protect the environment?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask the member from Huron-Bruce one more time: Why, if that is true, if her fundamental assumption is true, do Quebec and BC, which have had carbon price—BC's is at twice the rate of Ontario's, approximately, and they've had the lowest cost of living. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because they're only looking at one side of the balance sheet. They don't realize all of the efficiency that this drives in the economy and that it overall lowers and slows the rate of growth in the cost of living. They don't look at the fact that we are about to make massive investments in people's vehicles, in their home heating/cooling systems, in insulation, and in public transit and that people will not have to use carbon-based fuels because we're going to switch. We're going to renovate and retrofit every building in Ontario.

The reason that we will not be thrown out in 2018—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. New question.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. Last week, I asked the minister whether revenues from the cap-and-trade

system would flow into a special purpose account and not into general government revenue.

Last Wednesday night, we got our answer. The money will flow into general revenues, and the rules for spending this money are so lax and flexible, it could be spent on pretty much anything.

Will the government tighten up the rules for spending the cap-and-trade revenues and place this money into a separate account that pays for verifiable greenhouse gas reductions?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I look forward to working with the member from Toronto—Danforth because I know he cares about these issues very much.

All of this money, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But do you? That's the question?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins—James Bay.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: All of this money, Mr. Speaker, goes into a single account—reported in, reported out. We know that the Auditor General, as well as the Minister of the Environment and the entire Legislature, will pay very close attention as we publicly report. The Environmental Commissioner will also be reviewing that.

The legislation—if you compare our legislation to Quebec's or BC's or California's—is about the most stringent that you can.

We also have to report, Mr. Speaker, on four other things:

(1) The relative impact of every measure we take: how much greenhouse gas is being—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'll wait for the supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that there will be a similar question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: In the fine print of the government's cap-and-trade bill, we learned that the so-called Greenhouse Gas Reduction Account is not actually a special purpose account. It is an accounting fiction, Speaker, that gives the government total flexibility in how it spends the cap-and-trade revenues. Programs only have to be indirectly related in some way to greenhouse gas reduction. The money can be used for expenditures that have already been made. It can even be used on programs that have already been funded.

The NDP supports cap-and-trade, so we want the system to be fair, transparent and effective. Will the government stop playing accounting games and make sure the cap-and-trade system revenue flows into a special purpose account?

1130

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's very clear to me that the official opposition singularly doesn't believe you need a price on carbon to reduce emissions, which is a fantasy that only they hold. I'm still waiting for the third party to explain: What is your position on cap-and-trade? Do you support it? Do you not support it? Because, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chair, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: —on page 278 of the budget, the exact expenditure program is laid out.

I'd just like to add five things that we have to do in this process that I think should give some comfort from this. The estimated amount of funding for each action if it is funded under the greenhouse gas reduction account—a specific account—has to be explained, allocated and demonstrated. There also has to be a timetable for implementation. There has to be an estimate of the potential greenhouse gas reductions achieved and the cost per tonne of potential reductions, a public progress report on all actions and a five-year action plan.

If the member can find a higher standard anywhere in the world for accountability and transparency—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

CLIMATE CHANGE

CHANGEMENT CLIMATIQUE

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is also to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, who is very busy this morning.

Speaker, last year I brought forward a motion before this House to acknowledge that climate change is real, and the need to address it. I was proud to see that our government is once again leading in the fight against climate change.

Climate change is humanity's greatest challenge, and the debate on that is over. The impacts of climate change are expected to increase costs significantly in our lives, including human health, health care costs, tourism, infrastructure as a result of flooding and agriculture as a result of drought.

As part of our 2016 budget, we announced the details of the proposed cap-and-trade system, the cap-and-trade program, as well as introducing comprehensive legislation and posting a draft regulation for public input. Can the minister please speak to the strict rules and regulations that we've put forward on the reinvestment process?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the Legislature today for such great interest in this topic. It's reassuring to me that I sit in a Legislature where we may have different views but people do care about this.

Mr. Speaker, I just do want to take a second to talk about what the cost of inaction may be and what we're facing in Ontario. Southern Ontario, where the member for Huron—Bruce is, your constituency will be four degrees Celsius warmer than it is today. The entire southern half of the province—and every one degree Celsius means 7% more water is absorbed into the atmosphere. What that means to our capacity for farms and for the farm and agri sector is terrible. In northern Ontario, where much of our forestry industry is, it will be eight degrees Celsius warmer, and the impacts on forestry are devastating. The impacts on eight metres of our GO Transit line cost us \$600 million.

These costs will drive costs. A carbon price actually not only allows us to fund—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I know myself it's clear that the reinvestment of the proceeds will be done in a public and transparent manner and will only be used to deliver on combating climate change.

Personally, I'm concerned and I think I'm baffled on the position of the official opposition and the third party on climate change. Neither party and neither leader has offered a credible plan on climate change, as the minister has alluded to. It's our Premier, our minister and our government that are once again taking the lead on climate change and on policy issues in this province of Ontario. I understand that as part of our plan, we will be introducing a climate change action plan that will further detail how we will plan to reinvest proceeds and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Can the minister inform the House on what we can expect from that action plan?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I just want to be clear about this: We have had a climate strategy. We have a climate bill now in the House. We have climate regulations that were released last Thursday. We had a budget that outlined it. We will soon have an action plan which will detail the next five years of how we will spend and what our objectives are to meet our 2020 target—which, because the “cap” part of cap-and-trade guarantees, we will get there. We also have more public reporting mechanisms on how each project and overall expenditures are measured.

Ma chère collègue la procureure générale l'a expliqué. C'est très, très facile. Elle a utilisé un mot en anglais : « polluter-pay ». This is basically a polluter-pay system, which means that if you don't pollute—and we'll help you do the things so you don't pollute—her position is the same one that Mr. DiCaprio expressed yesterday, which is: Within the next 30 years, we have to solve this problem or we won't be able to solve any others.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy. This month we in the official opposition have asked the reasonable request for this government to finally address in their 2016 budget unsustainable hydro rate increases. They have completely failed to do so.

To add salt to the ratepayers' wounds, government ministers were crowing about \$2 a month off ratepayers' hydro bills, despite the fact that they have increased more than \$1,000 under their tenure.

Speaker, will this government finally admit to the people of Ontario that their budget last week was nothing more than a token—a cup of coffee, shall we say—and that hydro rates will continue to become more unaffordable under the Liberal plan?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, they left us a \$20-billion loan to deal with, and we're dealing with that.

We recognize that the price of electricity can be difficult for those who pay a higher share of their income

towards the bill, particularly low-income families and seniors on a fixed income. That's why we launched the Ontario Electricity Support Program and we moved the debt retirement charge on January 1 of this year, saving many families \$430 annually.

We also know that bills can be even harder for families and seniors in rural and remote areas who heat with electricity or use medically assistive devices. That's why we doubled the monthly benefit these families can access, up to \$100.

It's important to remember that the average Ontario household is paying around \$5 per day, which represents incredible value for money, particularly given the 90% emissions-free system this pays for, a system which is no longer prone to the blackouts and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: More shell game gobble-dygook from the minister.

Back to the minister: The minister knows that this insulting stipend won't even begin to come close to covering the cost of the latest increases that went into effect on January 1. Ironically, with the toonie they receive they can treat themselves to a small cup of coffee, once a month—how fitting.

Ontarians need to hear about substantial relief in their electricity bills, yet the minister seems unwilling to acknowledge the harm he has caused families.

It is interesting that the minister has finally found out what a cup of coffee is worth, after increasing hydro bills by hundreds and hundreds of dollars. Will he stand up and acknowledge that their budget will do nothing for families' hydro bills, or does he simply not care?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: As I was saying before, the government knows that there are families in Ontario that need assistance with their bill. That's why we provide the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit, the saveONenergy Home Assistance Program and the Northern Ontario Energy Credit, which can save families more than \$1,000 annually.

But as I was also saying, the average family in Ontario is paying about \$5 each day for clean, reliable electricity. For this price, Ontarians know they can light their homes, they can power their computers, they can charge their cellphones and they can run their dishwashers. This is very good value for money, especially when you consider that our system is no longer powered by the dirty coal-fired generation that used to make our kids sick—which they expanded—and now saves us \$4.4 billion annually in health care costs.

For \$5.26 per day, every Ontarian enjoys—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I stand, you sit.

New question?

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. Early in your mandate you challenged the agri-food

sector to create 120,000 new jobs in Ontario. That's on top of the 750,000 jobs that already exist. Farmers are the foundation of the agri-food sector. They grow the crops and raise the livestock on which the sector depends. Farmers have repeatedly told you that the cap on risk management needs to be lifted so they can continue to drive the agricultural sector. But once again, in this budget, you have chosen not to do so.

Premier, how can you set targets for farmers and jobs while refusing to give them the tools to do so?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the member opposite recognizes that we are the government that brought in the Risk Management Program and that we worked closely with farmers. The farmers have helped us design the risk management programs—because there are a number of them, as the member opposite knows.

We will continue to work with farmers. I know that the Minister of Agriculture and Food has a very close connection and, whether it's with the corn-fed beef farmers or the grain and oilseed farmers, where there are slightly different risk management programs, we'll continue to work with them.

In the meantime, we are investing in food processing. In the Jobs and Prosperity Fund, there's a particular carve-out for food processing in the agri-food industry. We know how important it is. We continue to invest and support growth in that sector, including, for example, craft brewers and fruit wines, who are going to be able to grow their businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again to the Premier, it was farmers and the government that designed the Risk Management Program. They designed it to be bankable and predictable. May I also remind you that it was your government that capped it, making sure that it was no longer bankable and predictable? The Risk Management Program is one of the best programs this province has ever had, but it doesn't work when you go to the bank and you can't guarantee that your risk is covered.

The farmers have repeatedly told you that this is the way to make sure that we can continue, that they can continue to create the jobs on which this province depends. Agriculture is either number one or number two in this province, and this government refuses to acknowledge the farmers with the Risk Management Program. They need that cap lifted. Premier, why have you chosen, again, not to do so?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We continue to make investments in rural Ontario. It's why we increased the budget for agriculture, food and rural affairs by \$138 million last year. As I said, we continue to work with the farm sector to make sure that we design those risk management programs, which we put in place in consultation with the sector, in response to the sector, in direct response to the need for farmers to have that predictability. We will continue to work with them.

We will also invest in their communities. We will also invest in the infrastructure that benefits businesses across

the province. We are putting more money in the Small Communities Fund, more money in the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. We're tripling the money in the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. You know that rural communities, farm communities, need those infrastructure investments as much as our urban communities do.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Finance on a point of order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I beg your indulgence and recognize a tremendous individual: a captain of industry, a major philanthropist in our community, a founder of a museum celebrating cultural roots in Ontario. He launched the Portuguese Canadian Walk of Fame, recognizing the likes of singer-songwriter Nelly Furtado; a major financier in our community, Michael Nobrega; and a pioneer, a businessman, as well as a community volunteer, my old man, Antonio Sousa. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Manuel DaCosta to this Legislature. Thank you.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to clarify and correct my record when I was talking about the shingles vaccine: All seniors between 65 and 70 years of age will be able to access the shingles vaccine free.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As indicated earlier, when he wasn't in the House, I would like to bring attention to a visitor: the former Speaker of the Ontario Legislature, Steve Peters. He and I are going to write a book.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to introduce to the House my new legislative assistant, Kimberly Aherne, who is in the gallery on our side—and my head of staff for the constituency office, Tom McGee; welcome—for the member's statement that she drafted today.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: I would like to introduce Madeline Edwards, a resident of my riding, and also my constituency assistant, Bal.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. Glad you're here.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RARE DISEASE DAY

Mr. Michael Harris: Today, I stand—and ask those in the House and those across the province—in recognition and support of Rare Disease Day.

Internationally, Rare Disease Day is celebrated the last day of February—this year, today, February 29, a rare date in itself. Today, participants from over 85 countries and regions are taking part in over 650 events, from symposiums and debates to marches, exhibitions and concerts. While we see today some acknowledgment from this government on the need to address the challenges faced by our rare-disease patients, it's my hope that through recognition of Rare Disease Day in Ontario, we can help move that acknowledgment to action and the answers sufferers deserve.

The truth is that while there are one in 12 Canadians affected by rare diseases, many in the public, the media and the government are unaware of the challenges patients face across the province to diagnosis and treatment.

There are actually over 7,000 recognized rare diseases and yet, despite those growing numbers, rare-disease patients are most often forced suffer in isolation, without the support, awareness and resources available to those with more commonly diagnosed diseases.

The recognition of Rare Disease Day is one way we can continue to work to build the support and awareness.

EMMA DONOGHUE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize Emma Donoghue, author, screenwriter and London West constituent. Londoners, and indeed all Canadians, are incredibly proud of Donoghue's Academy Award nomination for the screen version of her critically acclaimed novel *Room*.

This international bestseller, published in 2010, is a harrowing but uplifting exploration of a mother's love for her son. *Room* went on to be shortlisted for just about every literary prize there is, including the Man Booker. As a film, *Room* earned more accolades, including the People's Choice Award at TIFF, four Academy Award nominations and, last night, the Oscar for best actress.

Donoghue's extraordinary achievement is notable on several fronts. First, her literary and commercial success shows the importance of public investments to encourage the writing, publishing, distribution and promotion of books by Canadian authors and poets.

Second, TIFF provided a catalyst for *Room* to draw film audiences worldwide, reinforcing the value of the festival in profiling Canadian talent on an international stage and the economic impact of financial support for Ontario's film and cultural sector.

Third, with females making up only about 10% of movie screenwriters, and very few leading roles written for women, Donoghue's insistence on adapting *Room* for

the screen herself makes her a powerful role model for women in the film industry.

Speaker, I know I speak for all MPPs in saying to Emma that we celebrate your incredible talent, we congratulate you on your many achievements, and we can't wait for your next book, *The Wonder*, to be released on September 27.

WINTER STATIONS

Mr. Arthur Potts: These are sunny days in my riding of Beaches–East York. All along the Beach on Family Day weekend past, I had the pleasure of joining local councillor Mary-Margaret McMahon for the grand opening of our Winter Stations right across the boardwalks of Beaches–East York.

The event, in its second year, turns the Beach into a magical and inviting place in the winter by transforming the Beach's lifeguard stations into unique art exhibits. The art exhibits are selected by a jury with representation from architectural firms, the city of Toronto and consultants in the GTA. The competition this year almost doubled its participation, with 372 submissions from 49 different countries. Of those submissions, eight were chosen, the installations were built, and they will continue to be exhibited until March 20.

The Winter Stations have brought the boardwalk alive for a second year in a row with participating projects from across the province, including OCAD University, Ryerson and Laurentian University, and from other people around the world. These exhibits attract visitors to the Beaches–East York area and they give a great boost to local restaurants and other businesses. Mayor Tory visited this weekend, as did my sister and constituent Roberta Tevlin, who gave the permanent pilot project for a fire pit a two-thumbs-up.

Speaker, I would encourage all members of this House to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to come down to my riding and experience these unique and wonderful artistic installations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): She nailed her word count; that's for sure.

Further members' statements?

VIC HAYTER

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Today I rise to remember and pay tribute to Vic Hayter. Vic passed away on February 23 at the age of 77. Vic was an incredibly successful businessman and community leader. He purchased his first hotel 43 years ago and went on to own a number of very successful businesses. In Stratford, he owned the Arden Park Hotel and the Festival Inn.

Vic will be remembered for his humble and hard-working spirit. He supported the Stratford Rotary Complex, the Stratford General Hospital, the Stratford-Perth Humane Society, Stratford Summer Music, church groups and many other community organizations. Vic's love for animals was clear to anyone who saw him with

his cocker spaniels. I will remember Vic as a well-respected member of the racehorse community.

I would like to extend my condolences to Vic's wife, Jo Ann; his children, Edward, Stephanie and Gregory, and their partners; his grandchildren; and all of his family and friends.

Today in Stratford, they honoured Vic at a funeral service at the Stratford Festival. I have no doubt that many are mourning his loss and sharing the special memories he has left behind. Vic will be remembered for all he did to make Stratford such a wonderful community.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I rise today to discuss the issue of privacy and security when it comes to our personal data. A recent case in the States has raised issues around how important this issue is when it comes to our personal data with regard to our phones. In the US, there is a court case right now which is ordering Apple to unlock an encrypted phone. It raises questions around how important our personal information is. We acknowledge the importance of our personal information when it comes to our health information, but what about all of our digital communications?

We know, in a similar analogy, that tampering with mail is a serious federal offence. If you are to steal mail, it is an offence that can be tried by indictment, with up to 10 years in jail as a punishment. In fact, stopping mail with the intent to search it or to rob it is another indictable offence with up to life imprisonment, so it shows that as a society we acknowledge the importance of our communication being secure and private. In fact, I would make the argument that secure and private information in terms of our communication is linked to our freedom of thought and expression.

As a default, in our province, we don't have laws that clearly regulate and ensure protection for the public with respect to our communication, whether it is digital, through email or through texting or through other forms of communication. We need to look at this issue as a human rights issue, as a freedom of thought issue, and make it a default that our communications are encrypted and are secure so that we ensure the privacy of our information in much the same way we protect our information through the mail. Let's move forward in a new technological and digital era and address this issue.

BEVERLEY GORDON

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I am very proud to rise in the House today to recognize a fantastic individual from my great riding of Davenport, Beverley Gordon. Beverley's contribution to my riding and to our province can best be measured by the hundreds of Ontario families whose lives have been positively impacted through contact with her and with the Safehaven Project for Community

Living, located in Davenport, which she founded 25 years ago and of which she was CEO.

For those who have not had the privilege of visiting Safehaven, it is an invaluable organization that provides residential and respite services to families with children with multiple disabilities and complex medical needs. Beverley wholeheartedly believes that every child is special and can flourish with the support of their families and the community. Under her direction, Safehaven has enriched the quality of life and significantly extended the lifespans of medically challenged children in the province. Today, her vision has taken on a broader scope as other communities have set up services using the innovative Safehaven model.

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Beverley has lived her life with remarkable selflessness, dedicated to making life better for some of our most vulnerable citizens. I truly mean it when I say that I could not have been more proud to have been present as she received the Order of Ontario just a short few weeks ago. On behalf of the families whose lives you've changed for the better and those whom Safehaven will continue to help, thank you for all that you do, Beverley.

OXFORD BUSINESSES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to report the results of my annual survey of Oxford businesses, and I want to thank everyone who took the time to respond.

Again this year, the cost of doing business in Ontario is a major concern. Some 92% of businesses said they would be negatively impacted by the mandatory pension plan, and 67% said the impact would be significant. All of the respondents said they had been impacted by increasing hydro costs, and 72% said the impact was significant. Businesses reported their biggest challenges were "rising government costs," "hydro rates" and "increasing costs." Last week, the government had an opportunity to address these concerns but instead presented a budget that will make it more expensive for both people and businesses in Ontario.

This year, I launched my business survey during the CFIB Red Tape Awareness Week, and it seems appropriate, given that 75% of respondents said that red tape has been increasing. Businesses reported that the cost of red tape is significant. One said it cost them tens of thousands of dollars; another said \$50,000 a year. One small business said that red tape has reduced their revenue by 25%. These businesses are facing real challenges and the government's red-tape-reduction photo ops haven't solved the problem.

I want to thank all the business operators who took the time to tell me about their company and to share the challenges that they are facing. We know how hard they work, and I hope that the government will listen to their concerns so that we can create a climate where our businesses can succeed.

MADELINE EDWARDS

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: We all know that Ontario's highest official honour, the Order of Ontario, is awarded to exceptional individuals who have benefited other individuals by excelling in any field. It is an honour and a privilege to talk about Madeline Edwards, who has been awarded the Order of Ontario for 2015 and who is an outstanding constituent of my riding of Mississauga-Erindale.

Madeline Edwards is known for her staunch advocacy for social justice. As we celebrate Black History Month, it is important for us to celebrate the contributions and extraordinary work that people like Madeline Edwards perform day in, day out.

Madeline has been a long-time leader and a voice for the community. She was a founding member of the Mississauga and area chapter of the Congress of Black Women of Canada, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of black women and their families. She created a program called Suffering in Silence to support women who remain in abusive relationships due to poverty and unemployment. This program formed the basis of a non-profit housing complex where the victims of abuse could find a secure and safe place to live.

I am very proud of Madeline's work and contributions to our city and our province. On a personal note, I want to thank her for her continued support, advice and advocacy on behalf of my constituents. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate Madeline Edwards—she is sitting right there in the east gallery—for receiving the province's highest honour, the Order of Ontario. I wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Congratulations.

GRANDVIEW CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm in the House today to acknowledge Grandview Children's Centre. It's the only children's centre, treatment-wise, in Durham region, providing expert paediatric treatment and rehabilitation services to well over 5,000 children and youth with special needs.

Grandview has been operating in the region of Durham for some 63 years, and its headquarters are in Oshawa. On November 20, 2015, Minister of Children and Youth Services Tracy MacCharles, Durham MPP Granville Anderson and myself joined Ajax's mayor, Steve Parish, and all members of Ajax council when they announced that the town was giving Grandview Children's Centre a five-acre parcel of land on Harwood Avenue North to build a new \$44-million, multistory, 68,000-square-foot facility. Well done, Ajax.

This is great news, as I have been working with Grandview as an MPP and an Ajax councillor since approximately 2005. I was honoured to be the presenter of the very first half-million-dollar capital grant cheque to them for redevelopment and programs in 2007.

This past July, our Ontario government, through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, agreed to

provide \$850,000 for critical building-renewal projects at Grandview, again from our provincial government.

I am very pleased that our newly tabled budget includes an investment strategy for children in the province, as well as an investment of \$333 million over five years in autism services.

The executive director of Grandview, Lorraine Sunstrum-Mann, has spoken very highly of the investments the province is making.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RARE DISEASE DAY ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE JOUR DES MALADIES RARES

Mr. Harris moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 174, An Act to proclaim Rare Disease Day /
Projet de loi 174, Loi proclamant le Jour des maladies rares.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Michael Harris: Today I introduced An Act to proclaim Rare Disease Day to recognize the last day of February in each year as Rare Disease Day here in Ontario. A rare disease is any disease that affects a small percentage of the population. According to the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, one in 12 Canadians are affected by a rare disease.

While a Rare Disease Day is officially recognized throughout Europe and the United States at the end of February, this bill calls for the government to recognize the last day of February in each year as Rare Disease Day here in Ontario.

PETITIONS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's Drive Clean Program was implemented only as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and

"Whereas vehicle emissions have declined so significantly from 1998 to 2010 that they are no longer among the major domestic contributors of smog in Ontario; and

"Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

"Whereas from 1999 to 2010 the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and ...

"Whereas the new Drive Clean test has caused the failure rate to double in less than two months as a result of technical problems with the new emissions testing method; ...

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to phase out Ontario's Drive Clean program."

I proudly support this petition and send it over with page Julia.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. John Vanthof: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I wholeheartedly agree and send it down with page Delaney.

LUNG HEALTH

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I have a petition that's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children;

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"Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

"In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry's private member's bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014,

which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

"Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage."

I agree with this petition, will affix my name and send it to the table with page Ryan.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This is a "Petition to Support Bill 150, Energy Referendum Act, 2015.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Green Energy Act, 2009 has been a major contributor in recent years to the skyrocketing and unsustainable increases in hydro bills and has created an environment where large-scale renewable energy projects are becoming more prominent in all areas of the province;

"Whereas these large-scale renewable energy projects can have significant impact on property values, tourism, wildlife population and the very landscape in the communities where they exist;

"Whereas there have been instances where local municipal councils have allowed large-scale renewable energy projects into their communities against the popular will of residents; and

"Whereas local residents will be the ones who are most impacted as a result of large-scale renewable energy projects being developed in their communities and hence should be the ones who have the final say regarding the issue;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That members of the Legislative Assembly vote to support MPP John Yakabuski's private member's bill, Bill 150, Energy Referendum Act, 2015, which would mandate that local municipalities hold a referendum before large-scale renewable energy projects are approved so that residents are the ones who decide if these projects will go forward."

I agree with this petition and I send it down with page Charlotte.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition here from people across Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

“(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA ... to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

“(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario.”

I agree with this. I affix my name to it and will send it with page Sayeem.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I have a petition here addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, a concentration providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentration to protect against adverse health effects; and

“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province.”

I agree with this petition, will affix my name and send it to the table with page Owen.

BEER SALES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition with regard to beer sales in small towns. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the changes to beer sales in the 2015 provincial budget only allow for grocery stores to qualify in population centres of over 30,000 people;

“Whereas all consumers, including those living in rural and northern Ontario, will pay their share of the new \$100-million-per-year beer tax;

“Whereas many of Ontario’s craft breweries are located in communities of less than 30,000 people—four of which operate in such locations in Parry Sound—Muskoka;

“Whereas access for craft breweries to sell beer in grocery stores will provide the opportunity for increased sales and will support local jobs;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ontario government do away with the 30,000 population restriction so people living in rural and northern Ontario have the opportunity to purchase beer in their local grocery stores.”

Mr. Speaker, I have signed and support this petition.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I’d like to thank Sharon Simpson from my riding for this petition. It goes as follows:

“Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to “Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Delaney to bring it to the Clerk.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are critical transportation infrastructure needs for the province;

“Whereas giving people multiple avenues for their transportation needs takes cars off the road;

“Whereas public transit increases the quality of life for Ontarians and helps the environment;

“Whereas the constituents of Orléans and east Ottawa are in need of greater transportation infrastructure;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Support the Moving Ontario Forward plan and the Ottawa LRT phase II construction, which will help address the critical transportation infrastructure needs of Orléans, east Ottawa,” and our wonderful province of Ontario.

It gives me great pleasure to sign this petition and give it to page Erin.

EHLERS-DANLOS SYNDROME

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Canada Health Act requires provinces to fund medically necessary treatment for Canadians; and

“Whereas a growing number of people in Ontario suffering from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS) have to seek out-of-country treatment at their own expense because doctors in Ontario don’t have the knowledge or skills to understand EDS symptoms and perform the required delicate and complicated surgeries; and

“Whereas those EDS victims who can’t afford the expensive treatment outside of Ontario are forced to suffer a deteriorating existence and risk irreversible tissue and nerve damage; and

“Whereas EDS victims suffer severe dislocations, chronic pain, blackouts, nausea, migraines, lost vision, tremors, bowel and bladder issues, heart problems, mobility issues, digestive disorders, severe fatigue and many others resulting in little or very poor quality of life; and

“Whereas despite Ontario Ministry of Health claims that there are doctors in Ontario who can perform surgeries on EDS patients, when surgery is recommended the Ontario referring physicians fail to identify any Ontario neurosurgeon willing or able to see and treat the patient;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Require the Minister of Health to provide the names of Ontario neurosurgeons who can—and will—perform surgeries on EDS patients with equivalent or identical skills to the EDS neurosurgeon specialists in the United States, and meet the Canada Health Act’s requirement to afford equal access to medical treatment for patients, regardless of their ability to pay for out-of-country services.”

I fully support it, will affix my name and send it with page Ryan.

FINANCEMENT DES SOINS DE SANTÉ

M. Gilles Bisson: J’ai des pétitions ici en français, comme en anglais, sur le même sujet. Je vais lire la section française qui dit :

« Alors que la croissance et le vieillissement de la population de l’Ontario pèsent de plus en plus sur le système de santé financé par l’État; et

« Alors que depuis le mois de février 2015, le gouvernement de l’Ontario a diminué de près de 7 % les dépenses de service des médecins de manière unilatérale, lesquelles couvrent tous les soins donnés aux patients par les professionnels de la santé; et

« Alors que les décisions que prend aujourd’hui l’Ontario auront un impact sur l’accès des patients à des soins de qualité dans les années à venir, ces coupes budgétaires menaceront l’accès aux soins de qualité axés

sur le patient dont les Ontariens ont besoin et qu’ils attendent.

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« Nous, les signataires, demandons à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario que :

« Le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée revienne à la table des négociations avec les médecins de l’Ontario pour s’efforcer par l’entremise d’un arbitrage par médiation de trouver un accord équitable qui protège les soins de qualité axés sur le patient que les familles ontariennes méritent. »

Je donne ça à Charlotte, and ask her to table that.

LUNG HEALTH

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children and youth living with asthma;

“Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

“In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry’s private member’s bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

“Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage.”

I will sign this petition and send it to the Chair.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a health care petition and it reads:

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I've signed this petition, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

JOBS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2016

LOI DE 2016 FAVORISANT LA CRÉATION D'EMPLOIS POUR AUJOURD'HUI ET DEMAIN (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Sousa moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact or amend various statutes / Projet de loi 173, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter ou à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from York South-Weston.

I am pleased to stand today in the House for the second reading of Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016.

I'm proud to report that the 2016 Ontario budget, and hence the content of this bill, is the result of extensive consultations with the people of Ontario. In fact, the government conducted pre-budget consultations across the province. This included 20 in-person pre-budget sessions in 13 cities with more than 700 people. It included two telephone town halls reaching more than 52,000 Ontarians. It included receiving 500 written submissions, and it included online consultations with more than 6,500 users through the Budget Talks website. Ontarians let us know how they felt about the subjects that mattered most to them, like jobs, education, health care and the environment, and we listened. The result is this budget, a budget that continues this government's plan to create jobs and grows Ontario's economy.

Like many jurisdictions around the world, Ontario was hit hard by the 2008 global economic downturn. We did not wait to invest or address the challenges to enable growth, nor did we wait for the economy to magically improve. Instead, our government put a plan in place to protect and create jobs, to grow the economy and attract foreign investment, and to balance the budget by 2017-18

in a deliberate and responsible way. The people of Ontario embraced this challenge. This plan is working.

Today, Ontario is a leader in growth and job creation. For the last two years, Ontario has attracted more foreign direct investment than any other province or US state, and we continue to meet and exceed our deficit targets. As announced in the 2016 budget, the deficit for 2015-16 is forecast to be \$5.7 billion, which is \$2.8 billion lower than the forecast in the 2015 budget, and it's \$1.8 billion lower than the amended projection laid out in the 2015 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. Our government is projecting a further reduction in the deficit to \$4.3 billion in 2016-17, and we are coming and announcing a balanced budget in 2017-18 and 2018-19.

We sow what we reap, and our economy is growing. The Ministry of Finance is forecasting growth in Ontario's real GDP of 2.5% in 2015 and 2.2% in 2016. Our economic growth is now outpacing national growth and is expected to continue being among the strongest in Canada over the next two years.

And a further piece of good news: A key indication of fiscal sustainability is in regards to management of the debt. Our net debt-to-GDP is expected to peak at 39.6% in 2015-16, remain level in 2016-17 and decline in 2017-18. Furthermore, we are creating jobs, Mr. Speaker—lots of jobs. More than 600,000 jobs have been created since the recessionary lows in 2009. Ontario is projected to create more than 300,000 additional jobs by the end of 2019, which would bring total job creation to more than 900,000 net new jobs over a 10-year period.

But our work is not finished. Today we face new challenges: the price of oil and the Canadian dollar have fallen considerably. Once again, Ontario will embrace these challenges. These challenges also provide our manufacturers, our exporters and private sectors with opportunities for growth and job creation.

This government will continue to beat its fiscal targets while investing in the economy, people and a healthy, clean and prosperous low-carbon future. These investments will help enhance the public services on which Ontarians rely, as well as stimulate growth and investments like building and revitalizing our public infrastructure, which are critical to strengthening Ontario's economy and creating jobs for today and tomorrow.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the government previously committed to investing more than \$134 billion over 10 years in priority projects such as roads, bridges, public transit, hospitals and schools. We're building on this plan with an additional \$3 billion in commitment, bringing the government's total infrastructure investment to more than \$137 billion over the next 10 years. That will result in about \$160 billion over 12 years, starting in 2014-15, which is the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history ever. These planned investments would support more than 110,000 jobs each year on average.

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That's not all that we're doing to help the economy grow and create jobs. We're also forecasting and fostering a more dynamic and innovative business environ-

ment. Our plan continues to reduce business costs, leverage investments through strategic partnerships, help businesses go global and strengthen the financial services sector.

We're also developing a sharing economy strategy and renewing the province's social enterprise strategy.

Our government continues to roll out our Business Growth Initiative. This is a five-year, \$400-million strategy to accelerate the province's shift towards a high-growth innovation economy and help businesses scale up. It will also modernize the regulatory system and lower the cost of doing business in the province.

Mr. Speaker, we're planning for the jobs of the future. The global economy is moving towards pricing carbon. This is a key step in combatting climate change, and Ontario is taking action. Last week, this government introduced the proposed Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act. That bill sets the groundwork for a cap-and-trade program to help Ontario meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets. Together with last week's bill, the 2016 budget sets the stage for Ontario to auction carbon allowances in 2017.

A cap-and-trade program would reward innovative companies and ensure that households and businesses thrive within the transition to a low-carbon economy. All proceeds from the cap-and-trade program, projected to be \$1.9 billion in 2017-18, would be used exclusively to fund initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

These are just a few aspects of our economic plan to create jobs today and jobs for tomorrow. They include a plan to invest in people's talents and skills, to help all Ontarians reach their full potential and succeed in an evolving economy; a plan to move people and goods quickly and efficiently to attract private investment and to help people in their everyday lives by making the largest investment in public infrastructure in our history; a plan to create a dynamic, supportive environment where businesses thrive; and a plan to help strengthen retirement security for Ontarians.

To speak further on the 2016 Ontario budget and Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016—a mouthful, Mr. Speaker—I call upon my colleague, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, the all-great Laura Albanese.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for York South–Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to stand today and add my support for the second reading of Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the budget measures bill contains a wide variety of initiatives and amendments. While the bill contains a number of important initiatives and amendments, I'd like to take the opportunity to provide some background for the proposed changes in two specific areas.

This government's plan to grow the economy and create jobs includes investing in people's talents and

skills. High-quality education and training, starting from the earliest years and continuing throughout a person's working life, are what enable Ontarians to acquire and retain good jobs, while adapting and thriving in today's demanding and competitive global environment.

We have been successful on many fronts. For the early years, our changes are leading to better outcomes for children and a more seamless experience for families. We have modernized the legislative and regulatory framework for child care. We have enhanced program quality, consistency and access in child care and early years programs. This reflects our focus on safe and healthy child development and improved supports for parents and families. And of course, since September 2014, we have made full-day kindergarten available to every four- and five-year-old in Ontario.

We continue to take steps to invest in people's talents and skills. In the 2016 budget, our government is proposing to modernize student financial assistance to make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable. We are proposing to create a simple, integrated, upfront grant, the Ontario Student Grant, starting in the 2017-18 school year. Under the proposed system, average tuition will be free for students with financial need from families with incomes of \$50,000 or lower. Tuition will also be more affordable for middle-income families. More than 50% of students from families with incomes of \$83,000 or less will receive non-repayable grants in excess of average college or university tuition. No Ontario student will receive less through the Ontario Student Grant than they are currently eligible for through the Ontario tuition grant.

Students in families with annual incomes of less than \$50,000 will have no provincial student debt. The government will also expand financial support for mature and married students. Access to interest-free and low-cost loans for middle- and upper-income families will be increased by reducing their expected parental contributions. Most students will have less debt than they would under the current system, and the maximum OSAP debt level will be capped at \$10,000 annually for higher-income families.

As part of these changes, the government is proposing to discontinue the Ontario tuition and education tax credits, beginning in the fall of 2017. The proposed changes to the Taxation Act, 2007, are part of Bill 173.

All additional revenue from eliminating these tax credits would be reinvested to support the new Ontario Student Grant or other post-secondary education, training and youth jobs programs. We are proposing these changes because grants are more effective than tax credits at targeting financial support to students with the greatest financial need and providing support upfront.

Ontario's tuition tax credit is calculated based on eligible tuition and related fees, as well as fees for certain occupational trade or professional examinations. The education tax credit provides set amounts for non-tuition expenses for each month of full-time or part-time post-secondary studies. Students who cannot use all their

tuition and education tax credits for a particular year may transfer them to a parent, grandparent, spouse or common law partner up to an annual maximum. Credits that are not used or transferred are carried forward to future tax years.

The timing of the proposed elimination of the tuition and education tax credits would correspond to the introduction of the Ontario Student Grant. Ontario students would be able to claim the tuition tax credit for eligible tuition fees paid for studies up to and including September 4, 2017, and would be able to claim all accumulated education tax credits for months of studies before September 2017. The eligible portion of 2017 tax credits would be transferable to a qualifying family member.

Tax filers who live in Ontario on December 31, 2017, and have unused tuition and education tax credits available for carry forward would still be able to claim them in future years. Tax filers who move to Ontario from other provinces after December 2017, however, would no longer be able to claim their accumulated tuition and education tax credits in Ontario.

These changes will provide students who have the greatest financial need with better access to grants upfront when they need them. They will provide them with the opportunities and tools they need to succeed in the knowledge-based economy.

Another proposed amendment in Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016, relates to the changes we have been making to beverage alcohol retailing in the province of Ontario.

The government has delivered on its promise to introduce the sale of beer in grocery stores. Sixty locations across Ontario are now selling beer. Up to 150 stores will be able to sell beer by May 1, 2017, and up to 450 stores could eventually be approved to do so. Building on that progress, we are moving forward with expanding wine sales to further improve consumer choice and convenience.

1350

By the fall of this year, 2016, up to 70 grocery stores across the province will be authorized to sell wine and beer together, through newly allocated authorizations. Eventually, up to 150 grocery stores will be approved to sell wine from Ontario across Canada and around the world. As well, up to 150 of the province's private winery retail outlets, now located at grocery stores, will have the opportunity to operate their store inside the grocery space, enabling customers to buy wine with their groceries. In total, up to 300 grocery stores, both large chains and independent stores, will sell wine inside their stores.

It is important to note that the government also continues to carefully regulate the sale of alcohol. The same requirements for safe and responsible retailing of beer in grocery stores will apply to wine. This includes designated sales areas, restricted hours of sale, and rigorous training for grocery store staff.

The government is proposing changes to the Alcohol and Gaming Regulation and Public Protection Act, 1996,

as part of Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016. These proposed changes include establishing a definition of "authorized grocery store" and provide for the collection of tax in those stores, and increasing the basic tax on non-Ontario wine purchased at winery retail stores by one percentage point in each of June 2016, April 2017, April 2018 and April 2019.

These are just a few of the changes proposed in Bill 173. This bill continues the government's plan to build Ontario up and deliver on its number one priority, which is growing the economy and creating jobs. This bill ensures that we continue to build Ontario up by investing in our future. That is why I ask for the support of this House in passing this important legislation, Bill 173, Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm happy to rise today to add some input into the government's budget that they presented last week.

Obviously, our leader, Patrick Brown, and our finance critic, Mr. Fedeli, put three demands out in advance of the budget. Clearly, the government wasn't interested in consulting the other parties, let alone consulting anyone else in the province of Ontario.

What I want to highlight today is what I think is the greatest risk to economic prosperity in the province from this budget, and that is the Liberals' \$308-billion debt that they are burdening future generations in this province with. And \$308 billion, if the finance minister isn't aware, represents over \$22,000 for every man, woman and child in this province. I think of my family—my young daughter, my wife and myself—and that's \$66,000 worth of debt. That's just the provincial portion that our family is responsible for. Then you take into account the burden that the federal government is putting on families, with their massive spending programs and the debt that's happening in Ottawa. So I caution the government to really think seriously about the burden. It's easy for them to sit here at Queen's Park in what I like to call "the Queen's Park bubble," but they have to realize the impact they're putting on families across the province.

Just in closing, one of the asks that our leader, Patrick Brown, had in our PC caucus was to make energy more affordable. That is something that we needed to see in the budget. Clearly we're hearing from constituents—I know we are, in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex—who are really having a tough time keeping their payments going so they can stay in their house.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: We, too, had been clear ahead of the budget: "Let's make sure that we listen to what Ontarians are telling us." Ontarians have been saying in every part of the province that they have a hard time making ends meet, and that one of the reasons they have a hard time making ends meet is the price of electricity. But yet, we see the Liberal government continuing to sell

Hydro One, and we all know privatization will lead to even higher hydro bills. That makes life hard, no matter where you live.

Then we saw this over-four-cents-a-litre increase for the price of gasoline. I represent the riding of Nickel Belt; I understand that if you increase the price of gas, people will look for other means of transportation, but there are no other means of transportation in Nickel Belt. You could increase the price of gasoline, and it doesn't matter. There still aren't going to be alternate modes of transportation.

Then there is the 1% increase to our hospitals. You have to realize that right now, our hospitals cancel elective surgeries and admit people in hallways and in all sorts of areas that were never meant to be patient rooms. They have long wait-lists. Well, the 1% increase to our hospitals means that all of this stays. It doesn't have an opportunity to get better; it just stays where it is. But there are some serious gaps that need to be addressed so that we have better access and we have quality of care in your hospital. That is not part of the budget, which means that people will continue to wait, will continue to have their surgeries canceled and will continue to be denied access, and that's wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm thankful to be given this opportunity to add a few of my comments to this debate.

This morning in question period I had the opportunity to ask the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities about the budget and the tuition fee changes that have been made to the budget. My colleague from York South-Weston covered it extensively in her remarks, but I just want to reiterate that the changes the government is making in the OSAP program are significant for my residents, because you had to apply for OSAP under I think 12 or 14 different streams. It is now reduced to four, and it's simplified.

The other problem is a lot of parents and students did not know how much they would receive until they actually applied. Now it is very easy. You know up front, based on your family income, what is your opportunity.

In my riding, which is a low-income neighbourhood on the eastern part, I will tell you that that makes a huge difference to the residents, because parents used to be scared that they would not be able to afford to send their kids to college or university. Now they know they don't have to worry about that anymore. They can work with their children while they're in high school and encourage them that the opportunity is greater than it used to be, rather than saying to them, "I don't think we can afford university or community college for you." So I think that's great. My riding is going to benefit from it, and I think it is significant.

The other thing is, I was at a Rotary Club business meeting on Friday morning about the budget, and I was very impressed that the community is behind our government on the cap-and-trade program. We've spent many years trying to protect the Rouge River in my riding; that is a significant resource of that riding.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I rise to give a few comments on what I heard from the members opposite on this budget.

It's interesting to me that a reference was made to the 2008 recession, when things were certainly not good in this province. It went into the winter, and I know our own business had a downturn in business. Those are the facts. That's the first time we ever laid off our staff, that winter. But yet, this government kept spending and they've continued on that course. Even though they project their deficit to be eliminated in the next couple of years, the debt is projected to be over \$300 billion this year. That's nothing to be proud of. In fact, I'm sure that people who are in that business of finance will say that that is something that has to be brought under control. We cannot continue to spend like that and put it toward this debt.

1400

I also made mention of the cap-and-trade tax that they want to bring in. I do get worried when this government fools around with anything to do with energy. That's what is going on at this time with this cap-and-trade tax. We know what the green energy file has done to this province. It has done nothing but raise costs to where we have people in all sectors of our life—businesses and private—having difficulties with their hydro bills. That's going to continue to go up. So when this government has anything to do with energy, I certainly get nervous. I think the people of Ontario are going to get nervous about that, too, because, from their previous record on how they have failed on these different files from the past, it gives us no certainty of the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time that we have for questions and comments for this round.

I return to the member for York South-Weston, who has two minutes to reply.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I wanted to point out that we have a plan to reduce our debt and that we have stayed the course. Debt is one measure of fiscal performance; a better indicator is net debt to GDP, which offers a more complete picture of an economy and its ability to manage the debt. Our debt to GDP is forecasted to peak this year, as the members know, and it's beginning to level off. We are committed to reducing Ontario's net debt-to-GDP ratio to the pre-recession level of 27%.

The size of our economy, compared to the provincial debt, is more than reasonable. We have borrowed \$25 billion—not million; billion—less than our original forecast due to our responsible fiscal management. We have issued more bonds to lock in lower interest rates, adding stability to our plan to reduce our debt.

Ontario is recognized as a secure place to invest all around the world. We're recognized as a large and well-diversified economy, with a significant fiscal policy flexibility, a large and productive tax base, and we have no difficulty accessing capital markets.

Our plan to eliminate the deficit is working on target and on schedule: a \$5.7-billion deficit this year; \$4.3

billion for 2016-17; and a return to balance for 2017-18, as planned. The deficit is almost \$2 billion lower than it was in November—just three months ago—and not one cent of that came from the Hydro One IPO.

I also want to point out that the rating agencies have a very positive opinion of Ontario. Moody's, for example, has confirmed that the 2016 budget stays on track to balance the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize the member for Nipissing.

Applause.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The sound of one hand clapping: I always enjoy starting off like that, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to this bill, Bill 173.

I look forward to the next hour we have together. I'm looking forward to countering some of the things you may have heard, some of the spin you've heard from this government. Because, time and time again, we hear grandiose announcements from this government without any plan whatsoever. In some cases, there's no intention whatsoever to deliver a plan and to deliver on the results they talk about.

We've seen that over and over. I'm going to give you a few examples, because the 2016 budget is absolutely no different. The contents, again, show that this government is all about shifting your direction one way while they offer a different answer on the other side. That's what it's all about. We call it sometimes the "shiny bauble": Look over here at this exciting thing so they cannot talk about the things that affect the families the most. They're all about aspiration, but never, ever, ever about the actual operation. They're good at giving a promise, but never worrying about the actual details or delivering on that promise.

I know that Premier Wynne, when she was first elected, preached openness and transparency, but she also couldn't shut down the gas plant scandal hearings fast enough, the moment they won a majority government. Of course, we now know that criminal charges have since resulted from the information uncovered in those hearings that were not finished yet. She made a political deal with the NDP in 2013 to prop up her government with a pledge to reduce auto insurance premiums by 15% and didn't even get halfway to that target, because that was a "stretch goal," is what she ended up calling it. So my point again, as we build a base here for the debate we're going to have, is that it's always about aspiration; it's never about operation.

We saw that again with the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. The Premier ignored her own internal analysis and advice. The complexity and the costs began to mount, and the chorus of opposition from job creators began to mount, even though the Liberals pushed forward on this as a means to an end. They have now realized they're in over their head, they are delaying implementation by a year, and they've been forced to ask their federal cousins to come in and help them save face. But the finance minister has insisted that he'll balance the budget

by 2017-18, and—we heard today—he continues to do so, despite the Financial Accountability Officer stating that, in all likelihood, he won't.

The Premier stood in front of a "beer in grocery stores" banner last year to announce that she was selling off hydro. That's part of the "look over here while I'm really doing this over here." In the 2014 election, of course, we remember the Premier promised jobs, not cuts. Well, today, we're seeing nurses being laid off by the hundreds across the province. The list of examples about aspiration and announcements versus operations and the details—it's a stark contrast.

After all three parties finished touring the province and listening to the people's concerns, the Ontario PC caucus presented three requests for this budget. The first was to include a credible plan to make energy affordable in Ontario. That included the halting of any further sale of Hydro One. Our second ask was to include a plan to properly manage Ontario's health care system, including reversing the current and planned cuts to doctors, nurses, and hospitals. Third, we asked for a credible plan—a credible plan, Speaker—to balance the budget, including immediate action to pay down the debt.

Our finance minister, showing how absolutely out of touch he is with Ontarians, called these requests a fiscal fantasy world. In fact, again this morning, in response to my questions, he called it the same thing. So, according to the Liberal government, being able to pay your hydro bill each month is a fantasy. Having enough staff and resources in your hospitals to provide adequate care, according to the minister, well, that's a fantasy. I call those standards of living that families expect their government to deliver in 2016 and onwards.

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By moving the budget date up two months this year, the minister demonstrated the new heights of arrogance this government has ascended to. We know from experience it takes weeks to develop the budget, if not months to prepare it. That includes writing it, translating it and printing it.

Because the budget was delivered last week, that means that while your MPPs toured the province—at some expense, I might add—holding these pre-budget consultations in Windsor, Hamilton, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Ottawa and then two days here in Toronto—while those consultations were being held to hear from the people—146 deputations and 100-plus written deputations also—the minister was busy ignoring the people of Ontario because the budget was, indeed, already written.

Last week and the week before, we heard that this year's shiny bauble of distraction was going to be selling wine in grocery stores. The announcement, which was supposed to take place late last year, was delayed and bumped back to coincide with this budget. Why? Last year we saw that the distraction was beer. Everybody wanted to talk about beer, and that was to distract from the despised Hydro One sale. The government again, this year, wanted to distract from the fact that taxes are going

up on alcohol, gasoline and home heating fuel, and that tax credits that help children, students, families and seniors are all being eliminated. I'll talk about those in a moment because I want to talk to you about things that weren't mentioned in the budget speech.

In fact, seniors, as I'll talk about in a little bit, will now have to pay almost double for their prescription drugs. The vast majority of seniors in the province of Ontario will find their bills doubled.

On a personal note, as a northerner, I can tell you how disappointing it was that in the minister's speech about the budget, not one time did he ever even utter the word "northern," let alone "northern Ontario." Never did he mention northern Ontario, and that tells us where we stand in the pecking order.

As you go into the document, there was one mention of the Ring of Fire. Instead of somehow that being a calming thing, it was a reannouncement of a reannouncement of an announcement. If you go all the way back to the 2014 budget, you'll read a paragraph on the Ring of Fire. The sad news is that you can jump to the 2015 budget and read virtually the same paragraph. And really, really sadly, you can jump to 2016, to the budget that was presented last week, and see virtually the same paragraph on the Ring of Fire. What that tells us is that the \$60 billion worth of potential ore that's in the ground in the Ring of Fire means nothing to this government. Instead of being the solution to their problem, they ignore it, giving it no mention in the speech and one little repeated paragraph in the budget. That tells us that, considering that the wording hasn't changed for three years, the answer is that nothing has changed for three years—nothing at all.

I've been there five times—each of the last five years. Patrick Brown, our leader, attended there in May. We looked at the potential that's there, with boots on the ground. I can tell you how disappointing it is to know that, in fact, they're worse off today than they were the first time I was there five years ago. Back then, there were hundreds of people working, exploring, because of the potential. Now there are half a dozen people because this government has ignored the north and has absolutely bungled the Ring of Fire file.

The Wynne Liberals can deny, delay, delete and distract all they want. The simple fact is this: Until Ontario's poor financial state is addressed, this government will continue to cut funding to doctors, close needed schools, and raise hydro rates to make up for their scandals, their mismanagement and their waste.

Speaker, this morning we heard from our leader, Patrick Brown, when he started to bring some specifics out—as I will do, as I say, over the next hour. The minister promised to balance the budget by 2017-18, but if you look carefully in the budget projections, their revenue is a full \$4 billion higher than our own Financial Accountability Officer says they could ever be in his best-case scenario. They're making these numbers up, but they're not credible.

Our leader also talked about the fact of how they got to some of their numbers this morning, and about the fact

that they used \$850 million from the contingency fund to help prop up this budget. That's the rainy-day fund for the concern that a recession may indeed come back. That's what it's there for, to help us weather the storms, not their mismanagement and their scandals and their waste. That's not what the intent of that \$850 million was for.

They also played some other magic with their numbers. You know, we've long said—for two years now, we have said—that this government will attempt to balance their deficit by the revenue from the sale of Hydro One. We have said that, and in the fall economic statement—first of all, the Financial Accountability Officer pretty much laid that to waste last fall, followed very quickly by the fall economic statement, which totally laid to waste any illusion that anybody has that that money is going into transit or infrastructure. It's going to balance the deficit—to make the appearance of a balance. And now, in this budget, we know that definitively.

So they've not only taken the one-time \$1.1 billion in asset sale revenue; they've also taken the one-time \$2.6-billion departure tax. They have put that in the budget as revenue. Speaker, that's never going to occur again. That is why you call it "one-time revenue." It's in there to magically prop up the deficit number, but that does not mean the deficit has disappeared. We have a structural deficit in the province of Ontario.

Actually, it was BMO, the Bank of Montreal, that came out last week with a very good document. On pages 7 and 8 of this dozen-page document, they talk exactly about this very point: that there's a structural deficit in Ontario. That means we spend more than we take in annually, and it's masked over by this vast amount of one-time sale. Speaker, I ask what happens, not next year or the year after, because we know you've got \$5.7 billion more in asset sales planned; again, we call that selling the furniture to heat the home. What happens the year after the next election, when we're out of assets to sell in the province of Ontario? That's what this is all about. It's all about trying to give the illusion that the budget is balanced to carry us through the next election, and then—I don't know. A Hail Mary pass, I presume, is pretty much all they're asking for.

So now we know that the Hydro One sale is purely to mask the deficit. And, Speaker, that tells us that the problem in Ontario, when we read this budget and see the shell game that they've played—they've done that because life is harder in Ontario under the Liberal government. Life has certainly, on Thursday afternoon, gotten more expensive in the province of Ontario under the Liberal government. Again, they use these shiny objects to distract from the fact that they're about to make everything in the province more expensive.

This is a give-and-take budget. Nothing in this budget gives without taking something else away. You'll see some examples.

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It's all because there's no money left in the kitty. After 13 years of reckless spending, these Liberals are attempt-

ing to balance the books on the backs of children, families and seniors. You're going to see that here as I lay that out, Speaker.

Our debt has grown by 91% in less than 10 years, to more than \$300 billion. This is the highest rate of growth of any federal or provincial government in all of Canada.

This government's fiscal mismanagement means there's less money available to invest in Ontario now and in the future. I know that the member across the aisle in her speech talked about our net debt to GDP. It's almost 40%. That's not very good, by the way. But you heard what she said, and this is where these little buzzwords get used constantly. She said that we're going to get it down to pre-recession levels.

Well, let's just talk about that for a second, because what that implies is that the recession somehow had something to do with their waste, mismanagement and scandals. They always use it. You'll find it in every document. You'll find it in every speech. They always say, "We're going to get the debt to GDP down to pre-recession levels."

When this government took office in 2003, net debt to GDP was 27%. That's where they want to get to. But it doesn't sound very nice to say, "We want to get the net debt to GDP back to where it was when we first took office"—and roared it from 27% up to 40%. That doesn't sound very good. So they think, "Who can we blame this one on? The recession."

I remember when I first got elected, Dwight Duncan was the finance minister. I was a former mayor. When you tell people everything, it's supposed to be accurate. But here he is telling us, "I'm a brand new member," and in his first speech he's telling us the tsunami is why we're out of whack and why our deficit is so high. The tsunami.

I remember turning to my seatmate, who was also brand new, and saying, "The tsunami? The tsunami in Japan? Is that what I heard him tell me—that the tsunami is why our budget deficit is so high this year?" Yes, that's what we heard. Somehow that tsunami was the excuse back then.

You don't want to say, "We're going to get back to the net debt to GDP that we first had when we took office and kind of bungled it from there." It just sounds so much better to say "the pre-recession net debt to GDP." So you'll hear that. Watch for these little words. It's amazing the little tiny turn of phrase.

I remember when we were first investigating the gas plant scandal and we had this little turn of phrase as well. We asked a question: "How much does it cost the people of Ontario to close these gas plants?" They said it cost the ratepayer \$40 million. But I never tweaked back then. In fact, none of us really did. We thought they meant everybody.

Well, they had a fine line between ratepayer and taxpayer. So if you didn't ask the very specific question—but who would ever know to do that, that there is a difference? It's these little buzzwords they use—"It will cost the ratepayer \$40 million." We were focused on the

\$40 million and never realized what they said: "ratepayer." So you ask, "What does it cost the taxpayers of Ontario?" They always answered, "It cost the ratepayers \$40 million; \$40 million is the number." That's how you get caught in the little traps of their buzzwords.

We really have to keep an eye on that, Speaker, because there are plenty of these little buzzwords in this budget. That is indeed why we have a \$308-billion debt coming this year.

Let's throw our buzzwords out. This is the ninth budget in a row that the Liberals have tabled a multi-billion-dollar deficit. There's a stat for you. I didn't hear that in the budget.

Also, this is the first time in the history of any province that the debt is \$308 billion. This year alone we will be paying almost \$12 billion in interest on that debt. That's astounding, that that is the money that is going out the door. If interest were a government ministry, it would be the third-largest ministry—health, education, interest. Can you imagine that? It's shocking to know that that's where we are because of waste, mismanagement and scandal.

The government is mortgaging our province's future on the backs of our children and grandchildren. Our provincial debt works out to \$22,103 for every single person and child living in Ontario, and the Liberals do not have any real solution to balance our budget that does not involve a tax hike, a service cut or selling more assets. For instance, what you didn't hear in the speech is that Ontario's families will see \$1.9 billion more in personal income tax next year. They forgot to mention that massive tax hike that's coming.

Again, I did speak already about the fact that they've dipped into our rainy day fund—\$850 million came out of that. Should our province experience another downturn, we will be ill-equipped to support families with services in their time of need. Again, this government is making short-term decisions that will have serious implications on our future well-being. It's clear that life is harder under the Liberals.

But let's talk about some of the items that are in the printed budget that you did not hear in the speech. This is called Jobs for Today and Tomorrow, but let's see what they've done to some of the job creators. They reduced the rate of the Ontario Research and Development Tax Credit from 4.5% to 3.5% quietly. Don't tell anybody, but our job creators—it just got more expensive. The Ontario Innovation Tax Credit: They reduced the rate of that credit from 10% to 8%. That's what we're doing to our job creators.

If you want to talk about tax credits that were so critical in Ontario—I remember when they rolled out these tax credits. The children's activity tax credit: The name says it all. It's for children's activity. Your kids' sporting events—gone. They quietly took the children's tax credit and threw it out the window.

The Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit: I was sitting here when they rolled that one out. They had the video with the seniors and how great this was going to be

and what a wonderful thing this was. Again, it's all about photo ops. It's all about aspiration and never about the actual operation. So that Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit that was so important to Ontario only a couple of years ago when they rolled it out with photo ops and fanfare—gone; it's cancelled, it's over. The children's tax credit, gone; the seniors' tax credit, gone.

Education tax credits: Here we go. The tax credits are gone. You did not hear that part of the news. You heard one aspect of education, but you didn't hear the other side of it. If you're a family living here in the GTA or in northern Ontario—anywhere in Ontario—and you have two income earners who each bring home, before taxes, \$42,000, you are no longer entitled to the tax credits because \$83,000 is the cut-off. So a two-income family, \$42,000 each—gone; the tax credit gone. The children's tax credit, the senior tax credit, the education tax credit—gone.

Speaker, you've heard me say many times in this speech that life got more expensive for the people of Ontario, but all of these decisions have consequences. They all have a cause and effect. All these aspirational speeches with no operational mechanism put in place cost us money. So while we heard about the elimination of the \$30 Drive Clean fee—that grabbed the headlines—what we didn't hear is that fees for driver and vehicle licensing are going up; fees for camping in provincial parks are going up; fishing and hunting licences are going up; liquor licences are going up; event permits are going up; court applications are going up.

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All of these are now going up, and the sad news is now they're going to be adjusted every year. This isn't a one-time up. It's now built in, baked in, to this desperate budget where—I called it in the national media this week—they're looking for nickels and dimes in the couch. That's what it's down to. They're taking the cushions out and jingling, looking, praying for nickels and dimes.

When you're changing the price of a hunting and fishing licence, that affects businesses. That affects the livelihood of people in my area in northern Ontario, and in Norm's area as well, in Parry Sound, and in others. So what does that mean?

Now, it's interesting that when you're down to that, you're really into the change, and that means there's less disposable income for people, which means less consumer spending, which means fewer jobs. Now, you may think that's a stretch, Speaker, that charging all these extra fees is somehow going to have lower jobs. Well, Speaker, I tell you that their own budget verifies what I've just said. Again, when you start hiking fees for camping, hiking and hunting, it affects the camps, and it affects the businesses, who are going to hire fewer people.

If you look back at the 2015 budget, the government was forecasting 78,000 new jobs. But in the fall economic statement, they readjusted it down to 46,000, a loss of 32,000 forecasted jobs. Speaker, their own budget ac-

knowledges that they're not going to make their job numbers.

When you start dickering with these fees and making life more expensive for everybody, you have less opportunity to create jobs. When you have the highest energy rates in North America, you lose out on jobs. When you have the highest payroll taxes in Canada, you lose out on jobs.

So in this budget, where it was originally forecast to have 93,000 jobs created, the new updated number in the budget is 78,000. We're down 15,000 jobs from their forecast. The year after, where they were originally forecasting 99,000, right now we're down to 93,000, a difference of another 6,000 jobs. They're forecasting, because of their own policies that they are putting in place, that we're going to lose tens of thousands of jobs in Ontario—not unlike the Ontario registered pension plan, where their own internal documents, as I've said in this Legislature at least 100 times, that we obtained through the gas plant scandal hearings—they never expected anybody other than insiders in the government to ever see that document. It was confidential advice to the Premier, which we obtained and disclosed properly. They will lose 54,000 jobs. They knew it when they put that in, and said, "Ah, it's only 54,000 jobs. Let's go ahead with it."

Last year they predicted a 1.3% upward change in employment. This year in the book, they're now predicting a 1.1% change. Again, we're down a difference of 0.2%.

So that means something. All these things that they're doing affect families. They affect businesses. They affect kids, seniors, students.

Nothing will have more of an effect, however, than the proposed cap-and-trade. Look, climate change is a serious challenge. It requires a credible plan. I don't think there's anybody in this room that's going to disagree with that. However, let's hope that this government is not riding on the goodwill of the people who want something legitimately done. Let's hope they're not riding on that goodwill and using those funds for other things. You'd hope that, Speaker, but sadly, of course, we now see in the budget what this really means.

First of all, every person in Ontario is going to feel the impact of the Liberal government's cap-and-trade tax each and every single day. The price of home heating is going up, and that means whether you heat with natural gas or propane, for instance—northern Ontario, hello, going up. The price of gasoline will go up. The price of food will continue to rise as goods and products are shipped throughout the province.

The Liberals' cap-and-trade plan provides no details on how or how much their plan will reduce emissions or protect the environment. We continue to see more photo-op environmentalism from this government. That's what this is really all about, sadly—very sadly. This is the same government that created a health tax to support health care, but put that money in general revenue and began firing nurses and closing hospital beds. They are the government who implemented the smart meters, which were supposed to lower energy costs but never saved any family a cent. But instead of costing \$1 billion

to implement—of course, we talked about waste, mismanagement and scandal—it cost \$2 billion to implement.

It always takes either the Financial Accountability Officer, the Auditor General or the OPP to tell us what's really happening here. That, in itself, is a sad, sad state of affairs: when you hear one thing from the government, but something completely different from the Financial Accountability Officer or from the Auditor General. And it's always a scathing report. How many times do we have to use the word "scathing"? "Oh, the Auditor General issued a scathing report today." I've never heard one report from the Auditor General that wasn't scathing, because what they say and what she has told us are two different things. Yes, it's scathing, because we expected one thing: We expect that when the government says that smart meters cost \$1 billion, they cost \$1 billion. Your Auditor General has to be the one to say, "No, I'm sorry to tell you, they cost \$2 billion"? That's not what you like to hear in a democratic society.

It takes the OPP to tell us the real details. We've heard that, sadly, time and time again, whether it's in the Sudbury bribery scandal or in the gas plant scandal. We get the real story from the OPP. Isn't that tragic, in the province of Ontario, that that's where we have to get our factual information that you can actually take to the bank? That's shocking.

How can this government be trusted to do what it says it's going to do? It's clear that the Premier and the Liberals are trying to exploit the public's goodwill when it comes to the environment and to climate change. Ontarians expect their government will tackle climate change, while keeping home heating and gasoline affordable for families.

The Liberal government should provide assurance that the revenue from their cap-and-trade plan will be re-invested in families and businesses, and not go towards paying for their scandal, their mismanagement and their waste.

So, Speaker, we're going to see, over the next year, exactly how the money from cap-and-trade will indeed, sadly, be put in general revenue and be used to give the illusion of balancing the budget. We've already seen that in the fall economic statement. They already booked revenue at that time—\$1.3 billion in revenue is booked into general revenue. We saw that. Now that we know the cap-and-trade is up to \$1.9 billion, we say to the people of Ontario that we will be poring through, combing through these files—every day, every week, every month, all year long—to let them know exactly what's happening with that money. And to unmask: When this government says, "We're going to be putting into this initiative," we will prove to the people that that initiative was already in the budget under another name, and that money will be removed. So, yes, they will ostensibly be putting it into that initiative, but taking that money from that initiative and using it for the deficit.

That's their plan. You heard it here first, Speaker, just like you heard it here first, two years ago, when we said that that's what they will be doing with the Hydro One

sale money. They deny, deny, delete, delay, distract, and they did it, just like we said they would. It's all because of waste, mismanagement and scandal that we're in this situation.

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No situation is worse than our hydro for our families. I've stood in this Legislature—almost all of us here. We've all stood and given individual stories about people who are struggling. I remember—sadly, 12 months ago, from the pre-budget consultations—standing in this very spot talking about this very budget, and telling the story of Jennifer from Ottawa. Her name is in Hansard. She presented in a public presentation to us. She told us that, when she gets up in the morning, the first thing she does is turn her heat off until noon. She turns it on again until 3 o'clock. She gets three hours of heat and then shuts it off again until that evening, when the rates go down, because she has to choose between whether to heat or eat. That's the story Jennifer told us. That's a real person, with a real story and real troubles in Ontario. A year has passed and this government has done nothing for the Jennifers of the world. Nothing, Speaker.

Miss Monique Taylor: Made it worse.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: In fact, you're absolutely correct: They made it worse. January was one of the worst months we saw, with the double whammy. So under this Premier and this Liberal government, Ontario's hydro rates were made unaffordable for families and seniors, and they've made it uncompetitive for business.

I think I told you the story, a time or two, about a member from the Chatham area. We toured a greenhouse. It was the first time I was ever in a greenhouse. It was exciting to see, and to see all the people that were working there and the jobs that were created, and it was kind of wonderful to see. It was exciting. The owner was telling us of his plans to double the size of his greenhouse and hire 100 more people. I was just buoyed by that thought.

A couple of years went by and there was a reception downstairs in Queen's Park, just this past fall, and I saw him again. I hadn't seen him for a couple of years, and I said to him, "Peter, did you ever build that greenhouse?" He said, "Yes, Vic. I spent \$100 million and built that greenhouse, and I put 100 people to work." I was beaming for him. I was so happy, so proud of him. He said, "The sad news, Vic, is I built it in Ohio. I cannot afford the energy rates in Ontario." So he took his \$100-million investment across the border into Ohio and hired 100 people there and built the greenhouse there. Then he told me that his good friend and competitor, who has a similar greenhouse to his in Chatham, went to Pennsylvania and built his \$100-million greenhouse down there.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: So they're paying for their health care too, right?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I know you don't like to hear the facts, but we lost 2,700—2,700 fewer businesses; 2,700 businesses did what he did and crossed the border, because our hydro rate is the most expensive hydro in North America and our—

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: They're deniers.

The government has no credible plan to address Ontario's unaffordable hydro rates. Let me repeat myself: We have the highest energy rates in North America, and energy rates are scheduled to rise—rise, Speaker. What did this government do in the budget? They gave us a break on energy; you are going to get \$2 a month back under cap-and-trade. So they're using \$2 a month. That is insulting to the Jennifers of the world and to all the families in Ontario who have to choose between whether to heat or eat. So they're all wrong, according to this government. They are all wrong, and, according to the finance minister, it's a fiscal fantasy to want affordable hydro in the province of Ontario. All of this, by the way, is because of the government's waste, mismanagement and scandal—that life got more expensive in the province of Ontario for our families and for businesses.

Do you know, Speaker, that since this government was elected, hydro costs have increased by more than \$1,000 per year in the average family, and an additional 42% increase is expected between 2013 and 2018? That's the reality. I don't hear anybody denying that today. That's interesting. That's very interesting that not one of them has any kind of a response to that, because those are factual, right?

Every time this government makes a decision—
Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The fact that the government members aren't heckling is really no indication of whether or not they agree, because I would hope that they will not heckle you because you have the floor and I need to hear you. The member for Nipissing has the floor. I would ask the members to listen to his comments and give him the respect that he deserves as a member of the Legislature.

The member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much. Again, Speaker, let's look at the reasons why: waste, mismanagement and scandal. Those are the three reasons why our hydro rates are the highest in North America. What's worse, though, is that the government is moving full steam ahead with the sale of Hydro One, with no assurance that the fire sale of Hydro One will not result in even more rate increases for ratepayers.

The public does not support the fire sale and the experts say this is not a good deal for the province of Ontario, yet the government here—the Liberal government under Kathleen Wynne—is not acting in the best interest of the people of Ontario. They are looking for any way to raise revenues to mask the deficit that they and they alone have created here in the province of Ontario.

Let's talk about the increase in hospital spending that we heard about this weekend. Again, there's nothing in this budget, Speaker, that doesn't give on one hand and take away on the other. That's always the way it is with this government. They're not looking out for the people of Ontario; they're only looking out for their political survival. Obviously we are pleased to see that the gov-

ernment, after four years of frozen hospital budgets, has finally made an investment, albeit small, in Ontario hospitals. Again, the details are never discussed by this government. They like to give you the good news, the aspiration, without the bad news—the actual operation of these things.

While they claim that hospital funding will increase by \$345 million, what they forgot to tell you, Speaker, in the Legislature in that speech was, "Oh, yes, by the way, the gaming revenue that OLG has given to hospitals annually—\$107 million, by the way—that's being clawed back; you don't get that any further." That means that the hospital funding increase is really only \$238 million. If you remove from that the parking fees, now we're down to a number that is \$100 million plus, not the \$300 million plus that the government announced.

Again, as I said earlier, it's those little buzzwords. You've got to watch for those when it comes to anything this government says. It's those little buzzwords where they don't tell you the whole story. It's always about deny, delete, delay. That's what this government is all about. We continue to see this government claiming to do one thing but they end up doing another. The reality is, the government's ongoing cuts continue to hurt patients.

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I'm going to take a moment here, Speaker, because I want to talk about North Bay, my hometown, and what this has done to our city, and what it has done to the economy of the city.

We've had 350 cuts to our hospital in North Bay, including 100 nurses who have been fired. That's the reality. That's what has happened in the last three years. Last year we had 158 people in our front-line health care lose their jobs, including nurses.

We can talk about what that has done in the hospital, but I just first want to talk about what that has done in the economy. If you look back at November-December last year in North Bay, the university was on strike; Ontario Northland, the government-owned—I almost said "transportation and communications agency," but they got rid of the communications side of it—the government-owned transportation business was locked out; and the hospital had massive firings. As a result of that—

Mr. Chris Ballard: Massive?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Maybe you don't think 158 is massive, but I do, and the people in the city of North Bay think 158 is massive. We had massive firings in the city of North Bay. That has meant that car dealerships suffered, because there was so much uncertainty—

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Am I sitting, Speaker?

There was so much uncertainty in the local economy, because of these government insertions in our economy, that houses weren't selling, car dealers were struggling, retail stores were closing. Nobody wanted to go out and buy a new house. They just didn't know what the future had in store for them. Nobody could afford to buy a car, not knowing if they were going to get their job back or if they were next on the list to be fired. It really adversely affected our economy.

So when we see this frozen budget and the increase that hardly accounts for the average rate of growth of hospitals—which is between 4% and 6%—this is basically another cut that the people in my town aren't ready to hear.

I told this story once before: I was visiting my friends Joe and Jan in the hospital—one of them was a patient—and we were talking about the closed beds: 60 closed beds at a brand new hospital. This is the multi-hundred-million-dollar hospital in the city of North Bay. It was opened when I was mayor of the city. Thank you for the \$20 million that the municipality had to put in.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thanks to Monique Smith.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: She's the one—oh, that's right, she closed three hospitals. That's right. I recall that now. Speaker, the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Order.

Member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Some nerves are being struck on the other side. I know that the truth hurts, Speaker. I can tell.

When this Liberal government closed 60 beds in the city of North Bay last year, closed 60 beds—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll start warning you individually, if it comes to that. Thank you.

The member for Nipissing has the floor.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you. I'll repeat that, because obviously it strikes a wonderful chord here: They closed 60 beds.

I was in the hospital, and the person who was in the room said to me, "Vic, slide the curtain back and have a peek in there and see what that is. See what a closed bed looks like."

I didn't know what a closed bed meant when they close these beds. Sure enough, the room is empty. The bed is gone; it's folded up and in storage down in the basement, basically. The goodies on the wall are all gone, the phone is gone, the desks—everything is out of there, Speaker. That's the reality.

When you have these 60 closed beds, and you have 350 people who have been fired by the Liberal government and their mismanagement, their waste and their scandal, that tells you that there's uncertainty in the economy. There's uncertainty that is created.

They can talk about jobs for today and tomorrow. They can talk about it all they want, because it's aspirational. The operation—the reality—is, they're firing people every day. Every single day, somebody else under this government is fired.

This is a government who claims one thing and does the other. We've seen that, and we've seen the hurt that that has put on the patients. Not only are there no plans for more long-term-care beds or restoring funding for physician services and physiotherapy services for seniors, but this budget makes medication more unaffordable for Ontario's seniors, and I'm going to talk about that in a second.

These are the very seniors who are already struggling to pay their outrageous and ever-increasing hydro bills. Seniors have already seen their physiotherapy services cut, cataract services cut, diabetes testing strips cut, and hydro rates that, as I've said earlier, make them choose whether to heat or eat. Now this government is making the cost of medication more unaffordable. For seniors, life is harder under the Liberals. If you are making \$19,500 and you are a senior, the cost of your drugs will be almost doubled in the province of Ontario. Speaker, \$19,500 is the threshold. Beyond that, you are now being punished by this government for their waste, their mismanagement and their scandals, because they're making life harder for seniors.

Of course, the government, the Liberals, have eliminated the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit, which helped seniors live independently and safely in their homes.

Who in this government is looking out for Ontario's seniors? They are our most vulnerable, and they deserve better. They certainly deserve better than this government.

I want to talk briefly about the farmers all across Ontario. I happened to have a luncheon on Saturday with the East Nipissing-Parry Sound farmers' symposium. All the talk there was about the fact that the OMAFRA budget, the Ministry of Agriculture budget, was reduced from \$943 million to \$916 million. They know also that the government is eliminating the Local Food Fund.

Again, Speaker, these are announcements that the government made with great pronouncements and great photo opportunities and great fanfare. Then, quietly, they cancelled them all in the actual printed budget. They're cancelling the Local Food Fund.

In contrast to six other ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture—I call it OMAFRA—is not receiving any Green Investment Fund initiatives as well, we heard.

The cap-and-trade gasoline tax of 4.3 cents a litre: This is particularly painful to the agricultural community in any part of Ontario. Again, I was home in the north on the weekend and talked to these farmers. We all had lunch together. By the way, it was our traditional sea pie that was for lunch, cooked by the farm community in Trout Creek. There was nothing to cheer about at that luncheon. When they started talking about Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal government budget, there was nothing to cheer about. They were seniors, they have families, and they're farmers, and they got the triple whammy.

As I begin to wind down in my last few minutes, I want to talk again a little bit about the north. We are particularly hit this winter. The weather: They're forecasting 90 centimetres of snow this week alone. When I was home on the weekend, there was a tremendous amount of snow. I came back to Toronto yesterday, of course, and it was 10 degrees and there was not a snowflake to be seen anywhere. It's a constant reminder that life in northern Ontario is very, very different than the life lived here in the GTA, especially in the winter.

When we talk about 4.3 cents a litre in gas, we have long distances to travel from community to community. I know that there are members on all sides who have a more urban riding. You can get on the 30th floor of the Hilton and look down and see somebody's entire riding. That's just the reality of it here in the GTA. At home, it takes me hours to get from one end of my riding to the other.

So if I want to go to Echoes Restaurant in Powassan and meet with the community in the morning and talk about plans for a development that we're looking at downtown, and then I drive all the way over to Mattawa to talk about another development that we're working on, it's 20 minutes to get back to North Bay and another 45 minutes—well, I should actually say that it's about another hour to get there. These are long drives, Speaker, so when you have 4.3 cents a litre, that's quite serious to my friends in the north and my family.

When you talk about home heating fuel, I heat with natural gas. Many of my friends and family where we live out in the country heat with natural gas—until that ends, and then they heat with propane. This is particularly onerous to our families. There are many families right across Ontario who this hits, and hits hard. That's the reality of it.

So when we hear—or don't hear—the minister present a budget on Thursday and never once say the words “northern Ontario,” that is so hurtful to the people who I serve at home. When I think of the families who are struggling, when I see the child tax credit cancelled, when I see the healthy home renovation tax credit cancelled, when I see the \$107 million from the lottery corporation that used to go to the hospitals cancelled, when I see nothing other than a real slap in the face—the \$2 deduction off the hydro from cap-and-trade—that's insulting. To know families are struggling—in our office, we hear, day after day, week after week, families who come in and say, “I got the cut-off notice from hydro. I don't know what I'm going to do.” This is the reality that people are living in. Life is expensive in Ontario under the Liberal government. As of last Thursday, when we heard that budget, for those people who woke up in Ontario on Friday morning, now life has gotten even more expensive, more difficult and harder in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, this has to stop. They can give you all the excuses in the world and bark back and forth with their smart comments, but at the end of the day, it's because of the Liberal waste, mismanagement and scandals that have been exposed by the Auditor General, the Financial Accountability Officer and the OPP.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to rise and add my comments to the thoughtful remarks from the member from Nipissing. This morning, actually, I think the government referred to the opposition members as deniers and ditherers, but I would argue that that was not dithering, sir. That was quite an hour-long presentation.

In some of the comments that you made about the budget—as we're discussing the budget and there's a lot to talk about—you had pointed out that the government had presented things with one hand and took away with the other. You know, “Look over here while, really, this is what we're doing.” I appreciated that you also recognized the stretch goals within this budget and from the government.

An interesting point that we on the opposition benches seem to recognize is that this budget seemingly was already written. The voices across Ontario were perhaps listened to, but not heard, and certainly not heeded. I've never really been involved in printing a budget, but I imagine that, by the time it gets signed off, translated and actually printed, that was all being done while they were still potentially in consultations. I think that's disappointing for Ontarians to recognize that really the process appears to have been a farce. That's disappointing.

Something else actually interesting are the numbers that they make up for themselves—the job projections. They're falling short by 60,000. Interestingly, the GM Centre—you could fill that up 10 times with the number of jobs that they're falling short in their own projections, their own numbers.

Anyway, I appreciated the member's comments. Some of the great buzzwords that I would have liked to have seen in the budget: “farmers,” “northern Ontario”—those would have been some great buzzwords.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to rise and offer some comments on the member from Nipissing's address to the Legislature. It's fair that different sides in this House have different views on how to manage this province.

I cannot let some of these comments go. To suggest that there was no impact on this province's finances from the recession is not true. From 2007-08 to 2009-10, the Ontario government's tax revenues fell by approximately 7%, so over \$7 billion. At the same time, unemployment went up and the outlook for our economy went down. That had a real impact on our economy. That created a series of deficits because then it took time for the strategies that we have put into place to help build the economy back up and consistently bring jobs back to this province.

To speak about aspiration: I remember that the party opposite aspired to be good managers. They downloaded billions of dollars of expenses on municipalities. Our government consistently, and in this budget, is reinstating some of that funding to municipalities to help them maintain their roads, their bridges and their water treatment plants. They aspired to fire 100,000 people in the last election. Our government is delivering a \$134-billion infrastructure plan that adds 100,000 jobs each year in construction to build up the infrastructure deficit that that party left aside. The record is clear.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: Let me, first of all, congratulate the member from Nipissing on doing a great job in his hour-long leadoff of raising the veil on the waste, mismanagement and scandal that's coming from this Liberal government and pointing out how life will be harder and more expensive post this budget. He demonstrated how gasoline, diesel fuel, natural gas, wine, cigarettes, kids' activities and seniors' renovations to their home are going to cost more after this budget, and how seniors' medications will cost more after this budget.

He particularly focused on the north. I just happen to have a copy of Northern Ontario Business sitting on my desk, and it talks about the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines based on the Auditor General's report. "Ministry not Making the Grade" is the headline. The member from Nipissing properly mentioned how the north wasn't even mentioned in the budget. The only page in the budget was reprinted from two other years on the Ring of Fire. This government has just been a huge failure in making anything happen in the Ring of Fire.

Previous government numbers: We're talking about how well the government is doing with its debt levels. This budget points out that we're going to be at \$308 billion. All I would say is, the government members should take on a PR job with the Toronto Maple Leafs, because they'd make a last-place-finishing team seem like they're doing okay.

They're bragging about the debt-to-GDP ratio. It was 27%—that's their aspirational goal; maybe it's a stretch goal. They're currently at 40%. That's how you measure whether you can afford the debt. The net debt of the province compared to the whole economy, the gross domestic product, is approaching 40%—39.6%—and they're talking about it like it's a good thing.

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This government is first in one thing: We're the most indebted subnational government in the world. That's something where they come first, and it's not something to be proud of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I, too, had the privilege of listening to the hour lead from the member from Nipissing. I, too, represent a riding from the north. When we were looking at the budget, we were looking to see if there's going to be something for Ontario Northland so that the people have intercity transportation between Sudbury, North Bay, Timmins and Ottawa, but there was nothing in there.

We were also looking to see if there's going to be a few pennies put together so we can have our first board of governors for the Franco university, but there was nothing in there.

There's an entire industry behind Sudbury Downs and horse racing in the north. That entire industry's last hope was that in this budget, they would realize that by not signing a deal for horse racing in Sudbury, it is the entire agricultural industry that goes down with it in that struggle, but there was nothing in the budget for them.

Instead, when you look at, really, what makes day-to-day life in northern Ontario—I'm sure there's a few people who have a fishing licence down here. In my riding, close to 95% of the people hold a fishing licence. We're all going to have to pay more for that fishing licence. The same goes for a hunting licence.

When you talk about camping, it is a way of life in Nickel Belt. Everybody goes camping. Well, we're going to have to pay more to go camping now because fees have gone up.

If you look at a driver's licence—when I'm here in Toronto, Speaker, I don't bring my car. I use public transit all the time. Where I live in Nickel Belt, there is no public transit. I could wait forever for a bus. It's not going to come. Therefore, I need to use my car, and I will pay more to drive that car like everybody else in the north, and that's wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's four questions and comments. That concludes our time for questions and comments, and I return to the member for Nipissing for his reply.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank the members from Oshawa, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Parry Sound-Muskoka and Nickel Belt for their comments as well.

On page 5 of the budget speech—I remember when the minister was reading his speech, I put a big yellow Post-it note and I highlighted in yellow a sentence that he said, because I couldn't believe he actually said this and got away with it. He said, "We've created a business and investment climate that is one of the most competitive in North America." I thought, where the heck were you when the president and CEO of Fiat Chrysler, Sergio Marchionne, told the Premier, "You've created the most expensive jurisdiction in North America. You are making it almost impossible to do business in Ontario," and there's nothing in this budget that brings any relief.

He talked about hydro. He talked about the Ontario pension. He talked about the upcoming cap-and-trade. He talked about these things that are not only strangling his own business from expanding, but he talked about the fact that this is going to cost jobs across Ontario, and those people are going to have less money to buy his cars.

Nothing was more plain than that fireside chat that he had with the Premier, and it laid it out that the direction you're going is wrong, it needs to stop and then it needs to be reversed. So to hear him and then to read this, Speaker, again I say to you, it's always the Auditor General, the Financial Accountability Officer and the OPP who have to tell us what's happening in Ontario because of waste, mismanagement and scandal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to follow my fellow finance critic from the PC caucus. I must tell you, this is a really interesting budget from our perspective.

I was just going to reflect back on how the budget day rolled out. We see budget papers, budget documents and

the budget as a way to address some of the core issues and core problems that we see in the province of Ontario, so we see these documents as very, very important. When I reflect back on the process that led us, as the finance committee, to travel around the province, to listen to the lived experiences of Ontarians, to take their suggestions and their feedback and to make a commitment to them—the Chair of our committee and all of us, by being present at those committee meetings, made a commitment to the people who drove very long distances, who travelled by planes, trains and sometimes automobiles. Actually, that's the only way you can get around in the north these days, is it not?

Mr. John Vanthof: Actually, no plane or train, just automobiles.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No plane or train, yes; just automobiles.

We made a commitment, by being there in those rooms and giving them their opportunity to voice their concerns. The government did issue an online survey, and I think it was very popular this year. A lot of people weighed in. The government didn't necessarily like what they heard through that feedback. But this process is important to our democracy, because it indicates that we're not just here doing our own bidding, that what happens in this place matters to the people outside Queen's Park, the rest of Ontario.

We are elected to take our seats in this House and bring the voices of the people from our communities and our respective ridings into this Legislature in a respectful manner which is also true to our democratic process. Unfortunately, this did not happen this year, because what happened is that the government moved ahead and accelerated the budget process. I believe this is one of the earliest budgets ever tabled in the history of the province. I believe that this is one of the only times that the finance minister crafted a budget without the feedback from that committee.

In fact, we're still writing that report. I was just reading the draft report, because we're still writing the report. I think it's going to be a good report. I think it would have made a big difference, actually, to how this budget looked. I would have seen the priorities of the people reflected in this budget.

However, because there was a flawed process, because we travelled around the province and the government chose not to incorporate what they heard into this document, the 2016 budget, Jobs for Today and Tomorrow—I'll get to that title, because I think it's a contradiction. Because of that, we have a flawed process, and so therefore, we have a flawed budget. I can make this case in several different ways; it's unfortunate, really, that I'll only have an hour to do so.

We just had our briefing. What happens, for those who are watching, is that the budget papers come out—they came out last Thursday. We responded. We get a chance to process this very large document, which has a lot of things in it, and then we had our briefing today with finance staff and ministry staff. They're all very good

people. They're all competent people. They always answer our questions to the best of their ability. But imagine my surprise, Mr. Speaker, when I opened the budget bill and found that it contains almost nothing that the minister spoke about last Thursday, which indicates another serious disconnect.

We didn't see in the budget bill today anything on the so-called clawback of the social assistance, for instance. There's nothing significant in the budget bill about the health sector funding, and nothing in the budget bill about a credible job strategy. This is significant when, quite honestly, we have higher youth unemployment in the province of Ontario than any other province across the country. We were looking for a credible jobs strategy in this document, and then reflected in the budget bill, which would be the legislation. Once again, education, the public education sector, has been shortchanged, but there's nothing significant in the budget bill. These issues, apparently, were not enough of a priority to include in the budget bill.

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So, actually, our finance briefing was not very long because the measures that were contained and the schedules that were contained within the bill, for the most part, are fairly straightforward. They were not complicated. They were not addressing the complex issues that we see here in the province of Ontario around the lack of confidence in our economy and our jobs strategy, around the issues that our students and our parents and our education systems are facing each and every day. Not even around climate change, Mr. Speaker: That information, if the government is serious about it, should be contained within the budget bill.

There's also this outstanding question: Why did this budget have to come at this time, so early? There is lots of sort of high-level rationale around this. The Premier has said, "The economies are shaky, and we wanted to get this budget bill out." Well, this document doesn't improve confidence in the economy of the province of Ontario, especially if you follow where the policies go; they're not reflected in the actual budget bill. So that can't really be true.

There was something about rushing this document through to address the cap-and-trade program, and yet there's nothing significant in the budget bill about the cap-and-trade program. So there's a serious disconnect here. In fact, on the same day, last Thursday, when the budget was introduced, just before the budget was tabled, the government also tabled a separate piece of legislation, Bill 172, that addresses the early stages of the cap-and-trade program. So they were free to introduce that piece of legislation. They didn't have to bypass and undermine the finance committee and the budget consultations. They introduced the piece of legislation just last Thursday morning. So why was this budget needed so early?

It's very problematic to me, and it's very problematic to the people of this province when they see the government undermine that public consultation process, shut out the voices of Ontarians and shut out their priorities

around the budget process, for no apparent reason at all. It's just politics—that's really the only excuse. Even that doesn't make a lot of sense. We have a budget that is built on the priorities of the finance minister, the Premier, and perhaps Mr. Clark, who has been informing some of the changes in policies around privatization in this province. But those are not the priorities of the people of this province.

As I reflect back and I look at, for instance, some of the other areas that are not addressed in the budget bill—the increase of the \$345 million in hospital funding. There's nothing in the bill about that issue. The Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health were at a congratulatory conference just this morning making that announcement. The overall funding for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is now set at \$51.8 billion. What we heard around the province around health care was that four years of funding cuts to hospitals greatly undermined the confidence of people in the health care system, especially around hospitals. The Minister of Health is keen to say that hospitals are for acute care, so only go to a hospital if you are seriously sick. But if you're in a community where you don't have a doctor, if you're in a community where you don't have a hospice or palliative care or a chronic pain clinic or even the ability to get blood tests and lab testing done, you end up in the hospital.

So the announcement this morning, this \$345 million, will not keep pace with an aging demographic; it will not keep pace with the rate of inflation, especially the way that this province is moving forward; and it will not keep pace with population growth. Base operating funding for hospitals, which has been frozen for four straight years, will increase by 1%. Mr. Speaker, 1% is not going to cut it.

The director for the regional hospital in Windsor came to the committee and gave an excellent report. It actually stuck with me because he connected the cost of operating a hospital with the impact of electricity costs on the health care system. The hydro rates for that one particular hospital went up, in one year, over \$700,000. That has an impact on the operations of that hospital. Now, the hydro bill for Windsor Regional Hospital is \$4.2 million a year, because Ontario has the highest electricity rates in Canada. He also said quite simply that he can't cut anymore; he can't. But this 1% is not going to put him in a position, as a CEO of a hospital, to try to undo some of the damage of the last four years.

Hospital funding, base operating funding, as I said, has been frozen for four straight years. That means while the hospital funding freeze is over—and actually, it was really interesting because for the last two years, the Minister of Health has denied that those budgets were frozen. Even when we would point to the page in the budget, he would say, "We're not cutting." Even when nurses were right here in the gallery, he said, "We are not firing nurses." I think they differed a couple of times. They had lost their jobs; they were no longer employed; they had been let go. Some people call that getting fired in the health care sector.

The overall increase to hospital funding is going to be \$345 million, composed of the base increase—less than \$200 million—and other undefined pots of money.

So on the health care front, there's a transformation at play right now. I will say, though, that the committee members heard very strong delegations around hospices. It was a relief, actually, for us to see \$75 million over three years, I believe it is, for hospice care.

I think it was a real surprise for people on the committee to find out that in the current funding model for what exists in the province of Ontario, which is a very limited hospice model for palliative care, those funds that currently flow are only for nursing and front-line care. They're not for the operating costs. They're not for the hydro or the heat or even the food. So the entire model of hospice care needs to be revisited.

The \$75 million: I would say, you know what? We absolutely welcome it. That said, there is a lot of work to do on this file. I know the member from Ottawa South is very committed to this issue. We look forward to seeing a true transformation in palliative care and hospice care because, as we heard in the finance committee, the cost to deal with someone who is dying with compassion and humanity is economically more beneficial to the province than it is for them to pass away in a hospital bed where, quite honestly, nobody wants to be. You should only go to hospitals when you are seriously sick and need specific care. But you can't do that when you don't have the other options in your community.

This document is called "Jobs for Today and Tomorrow." It's an odd title for a budget that doesn't present any credible job creation strategies, I have to say. It's a nice title, it's a pretty cover, but it doesn't address the core issues.

When I think of where we are in the province of Ontario on the jobs crisis—every day, we try to stand up and draw attention to the fact that the new reality in the province of Ontario is precarious work. I'll quote from a Toronto Star article from last year by Laurie Monsebraaten. This was a report that came out from United Way and McMaster University. They had accumulated and done some research. Their findings were "that fewer than half of workers in the GTA and Hamilton are in permanent, full-time jobs."

"Instead, about 52% ... are in temporary, contract, or part-time positions."

"All the indicators suggest that this is the trend of the new labour market." This came from the lead researcher, Wayne Lewchuk. "This is the new form of employment" in the province of Ontario. "It is also a major cause of social stress for people, regardless of income."

"Precarious workers are twice as likely as those in stable jobs to report having mental health problems."

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This report was confirmed by those people who came to speak to the budget committee. The director of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction pretty much shocked all of us when he talked about the nature of unemployment and the impact precarious, unstable work

has on the life of a family, on the lives of children. Some 60% of those students who have parents who have precarious work, who have unstable income, who live in unstable housing, are transient students, essentially. Because they don't have a stable home, because they don't have a stable income, they move from school to school because they have to go where the housing is; they have to go where they can find emergency shelters, emergency housing. Obviously, that has a negative impact on their success rate in education. When you are moving from school to school and you are dealing with parental stress, that compromises your health, that compromises your ability to be successful, and it compromises your ability to reach your potential.

That's what this Premier said she wanted, Mr. Speaker. You remember it well—ruling from the activist centre, using evidence-based decision-making, using research and applying it to policy, and then applying it also into legislation.

I have to say that the editorial today in the Toronto Star countered that entirely. Today's editorial is called "Shortchanging Kids." The first line says, "Rarely has a Liberal government in Ontario tabled a less child-friendly budget than Jobs for Today and Tomorrow. The highlights of the province's 2016 financial plan.... There was no money for affordable child care." What a missed opportunity, building on what the Auditor General told us about the lack of safe, affordable, accessible child care in the province of Ontario. She identified, of course, the inconsistencies in those policies that directly affected the well-being of children.

Given the research and the evidence, as confirmed by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care's press release, when you invest in child care, the return on investment from an economic perspective is twofold, sometimes more, depending on the neighbourhood. It directly has a positive and substantive impact on the lives of women and mothers, allowing them to work, allowing them to go to school, allowing them to better their lives. When those women, when those mothers improve their lives, then the lives of their children in turn are benefitted. Yet there is not any substantive investment in child care.

This is 2016. We know better. This Premier has stood up on so many occasions and said the exact same thing that I just said, because it's true: When you invest in child care, the return on investment cannot be questioned. The evidence is there, the research is there. Instead, we have this rhetoric from this government on full-day kindergarten. Well, people in 2016 do not work the length of the school day. They do not work from 9 until 3. They need that seamless day that this government originally promised and then backtracked on.

I have to say, from a poverty reduction standpoint, if you are serious about addressing child poverty, family poverty, if you are serious about allowing people to reach their potential from an educational perspective, then child care is the go-to place. Investing in early learning and care is the greatest way that you can impact and benefit

communities as a whole. Yet in this budget, once again, a missed opportunity, and then just a pointing or tag-off onto the full-day kindergarten program.

The editorial today says, "Investing in child care has a double payback. It improves the life chances of low-income kids and frees their parents to work. Without a strong start, many disadvantaged kids don't complete high school, let alone go on to college or university." It goes on to talk about children's aid societies, which I may touch on in just a second.

I need to go back to jobs because, obviously, I see the connection and we see the connection between investing in child care and strengthening the economy. Yet this budget once again downgrades the government's own commitment or target around job creation. Instead, the government proposes the Business Growth Initiative—and it's meant to increase global competitiveness—which would commit \$400 million over five years. Yet the Liberals project that they will fail to meet last year's job creation goals by more than 60,000 jobs, from 2015 to 2018. Just in case anybody wants to question that, I just have to go back to last year's budget. They projected 78,000 jobs for that year, but then in the fall economic statement for 2015 they projected 46,000 jobs, which was a decrease of 32,000 jobs.

So we're going in the wrong direction; that's my point. The government is not even aspiring anymore to hit those targets around job creation. Businesses' investment is expected to be significantly low this year, as a result of a number of initiatives, including the sell-off of Hydro One and high electricity rates. We heard this very clearly, particularly in the north.

The mayor of Thunder Bay's report to us sticks out to me, because he made the point that, as a whole, that city, their local chamber and their local economic development corporation desperately are trying to draw people to northern Ontario, because northern Ontario has so much potential; it truly does. And yet, because the infrastructure investments have not been there or have not been followed through or have been re-announced, people have lost confidence in those infrastructure investments. I have only to cite the Ring of Fire, which he also addressed. I remember sitting up there in 2007, when Dwight Duncan was the finance minister, and that was when they first made the announcement of the Ring of Fire. Some of us cynically sometimes refer to it as the "ring of smoke," but it's too important to lose sight of the potential of the Ring of Fire. What the mayor of Thunder Bay said, very clearly, is that there are two access roads that need to happen, and they need to happen now. He called on this government in a very passionate and compelling way to follow through on the commitment that you made to northern Ontario.

The other major stumbling block, obviously, for northern Ontario is the high cost of electricity. I think the critic from the PC Party truly addressed some of those concerns. We've heard it, though, from our northern members. There's a reason that our members have generators. Sometimes they have to compare who has a bigger

generator than the other one. There's an instability to the energy sector in the north which we don't have to face here in southern Ontario. That's just a fact.

So that deputation from the mayor of Thunder Bay really stuck with me. I must also say that when he did comment on the correctional facility in Thunder Bay, he really implored the government. He acknowledged that you don't need to build new correctional facilities probably all over Ontario, but what you do need to do is that you need to knock down that rat hole. That is what he called the correctional facility in Thunder Bay; he called it a "rat hole." He said it can't be fixed. You would not expect the conditions in that facility in this great country, this great province. You might expect it in Third World conditions; that's how bad it is.

The correctional officers from across the province did an outstanding job of coming to us and making a strong case for a better justice system and for a more compassionate system, where post-traumatic stress disorder is not the issue that they face each and every day. I was pleased that they came with figures, with numbers and with a great business case to streamline those correctional facilities.

When I did tour Vanier and Maplehurst in Milton—I drive by them all the time. I did a tour with our critic from Oshawa. I have to say, when I was in the Vanier women's prison, there was great instability in the sector at the time. But to see those who are mentally ill in those small little cells for 23 hours of solitary confinement is a kind of depravity that I can never un-see, that I can never un-experience. I must tell you, once you bear witness to those conditions in those jails, you must take action. To see that the ministry of justice under corrections receives so little funding for those body scanners, for the communication tools, for the body vests, for the protective fire equipment—it just seems like it's so low on the priority list.

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That's how you can actually see where this government puts its priorities: when you follow the money. You can read the press releases, cut the ribbons, get the shovels out and dig a hole, but at the end of the day, it's where the money's going. Those are the real priorities of a government.

Sadly, for the correctional sector, these people, some of them—60% of them in Vanier have never had their day in court. The correctional officer in Thunder Bay said, "You know, people go into those facilities, potentially innocent, but they don't come out innocent." I can tell you that it is an unnatural place to be, and there is nothing restorative about those facilities. There is no compassion for someone who is mentally ill and who lives in solitary confinement for 23 hours of the day. It's inhumane. It needs to be addressed, and there needs to be a serious overhaul in the justice system in the province of Ontario.

There's no reason that our jails are filled with 60% of people who can't afford bail—and that was another issue that was raised in today's editorial. "There was no

funding"—so this particularly addressed youth in our court system. The editorial from the Toronto Star goes on to say: "There was no funding to alleviate the massive backlog in the province's courts. This leaves thousands of young Ontarians, charged but not convicted, in pre-trial custody. Judges, lawyers and prison reform advocates have urged the government to speed up the trial process. But without more courtrooms, that isn't likely to happen. The logjam takes its heaviest toll on young offenders from poor families who can't come up with the bail to get out of jail until their court date."

I can tell you that, based on just the observation of what I saw in those facilities, there's a disproportional amount of people who are clearly suffering and who don't have advocates in their lives, and without advocates in their lives, they are destined to sit there until they can get a court date, which is completely unjust. It is an unjust justice system. It needs to be said.

A 2013 study by the United Way—this is back to precarious work—found, as I said, that 52% of those workers in the GTHA are in temporary, contract or part-time positions. This government does not accept those stats. They stand up every single day and they challenge these stats. This is actually what we heard from people on the budget consultation process. Part-time work is also a characteristic of poor education, and we know that there are many individuals in the service and retail sectors who simply don't have the stability of knowing how many hours they're going to get from one week to the next. This is not only playing havoc with the stress of those individuals, but again, it's just not good for the economy.

Despite the fact that for 12 years straight—12—Ontario's youth unemployment rate has sat above the national rate, there's no new funding to combat youth unemployment in this budget, nor was there any in the budget bill. We do know a little bit about the government's track record on job creation strategies, though, which might suggest a bit of a guide to understanding the initiative proposed in this year's budget.

I just want to point out that I started my comments today on the budget bill by saying that a budget is an opportunity for the government to address some systemic issues that you see in the province, and we have several Auditor General reports that give you enough information to take some action on.

I'm thinking most recently about the one that just came out in December 2015. The Auditor General found that on the issue of funding awards that this government gives out, like the southwestern development fund or the RED fund or the eastern development fund, and this is a direct quote, "Since 2010, about 80% of total approved funding was made through non-publicly advertised processes in which only selected businesses were invited to apply."

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, the Auditor General—yes, it's amazing to me. The Auditor General is wrong; the Liberals are right—whatever.

"The ministry could not provide selection criteria or ... a list of companies invited to apply for funding."

Therefore, “the ministry also does not maintain a list of the businesses rejected for funding, or those that withdrew their applications.”

“Funding often awarded without needs assessment. The ministry almost never assesses whether businesses need public funding in order to achieve the proposed project.”

Again from the Auditor General’s report: “In one case, a manufacturer was approved for a \$1-million grant in 2013 to install a new \$14-million production line, even though there was documentation on file saying ‘it appears the project will move ahead regardless of the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund support.’”

So not only was this an invite-only process, not only was the ministry awarding funding to a company that didn’t necessarily need the funding, but then they go on to not even measure whether or not it made any difference to job creation. You couldn’t even make this stuff up; I really do think that sometimes.

In another case, it was found that funding was not provided based on need, but rather because the funding was important to the investors to provide confidence to remain in Canada.

I’ll tell you what undermines confidence, Mr. Speaker: a process where a government chooses winners and losers in the economic development of the province. That undermines confidence, which is most unfortunate because there are companies out there who could benefit through an open and transparent method of awarding funding. There are many businesses and many young entrepreneurs across this great province who want to be part of the solution for the economy. They’re not keen anymore on working for a large corporation or a large company, and they like the idea of developing their own product and being their own boss. That was the original intent, actually, of the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund.

Yet when the Auditor General goes back to the ministry and asks for documentation, asks for the transparency around the awarding of those funds—because these aren’t Liberal funds; this is the money that the people of this great province have directed here through a revenue stream. They have a right to know where that money is going.

Still on jobs and the economy, she also found that some public information was misleading. She said that over “the last 10 years and as recently as January 2015, the government publicly announced almost \$1 billion more of economic-development and employment-support funding projects by reannouncing the same available funding under different fund programs.”

That’s disappointing, you have to say. It’s a little shell game. That’s what it seems like, Mr. Speaker. When there’s a reannouncement of funding that’s already been awarded, as I said, it doesn’t instill confidence. Overall, it has overstated its funding by over \$1 billion.

In this budget—as I said, you have this Auditor General’s report, which highlights some systemic issues and clearly some lack of transparency. You have the

opportunity, through a budget document, to address this in a meaningful way. The budget bill today is silent essentially on economic development or at least increasing the transparency of those funds.

The key economic goals were ignored. Instead of focusing on increasing exports, developing innovations or increasing productivity, contracts did not formally require improvements in any of these areas.

“Other provinces set targets.” I can’t emphasize this enough. Setting targets matters. Having an open and transparent way to measure progress on investment matters. Most businesses understand this. Why should the government get to create their own rules around economic development funding?

We were pleased to accept the Auditor General’s report and act on it. That is why we’re trying to hold this government to account through this budget process.

That’s enough. It was pretty disappointing, on the whole.

What is ironic for us is that this document is called Jobs for Today and Tomorrow and yet you have a government that has missed their target on almost everything. They missed their target on job creation. They missed their target on employment growth. They’ve missed their target on the downgraded jobs from last year’s budget. They’ve decreased the ORDTC rate from 4.5% to 3.5%. They are decreasing the OITC rate from 10% to 8%. Then, as I mentioned, they’re packaging this all back up into the business growth initiative.

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And yet there’s still a lack of transparency around how the funding will flow out of this place to those businesses. I have to say, it doesn’t instill confidence. For us, based on the feedback that we received through the budget consultation process, that’s disturbing.

I think one of the issues that garnered the most attention through this budget, aside from the lack of a credible plan around jobs, was the issue of drug costs for seniors. It was an interesting exchange this morning, I think we would all agree, between our leader and the Premier, because the Premier sort of said that by default, clearly that threshold for seniors is going to cause some damage.

There’s an opportunity here to fix it, but just to recap: The drug program changes caught every senior in the province of Ontario by surprise, because there was no senior who showed up at budget consultations and said, “You know what? We’re doing okay in the province of Ontario. It’s completely affordable for us. Why don’t we pay a little bit more for drugs?” Nobody said that. I just want to clarify that and get it on the record.

Starting August 1, 2016, the government is increasing the seniors’ low-income thresholds. The government says it’s going to add 170,000 seniors who will qualify, but for single seniors, the low-income threshold will increase from \$16,000 to \$19,000. Now, I don’t consider a senior who lives on \$19,000 to be a rich senior. I really don’t, and if you are a senior and have budgeted for this upcoming year, and then you find out that your drug costs

are going to double—I think, quite honestly, Mr. Speaker, that this will hurt seniors.

Actually, we did hear from a number of seniors. CARP weighed in quite heavily on this issue, which was really good to see, because they are a respected organization. They indicated that this did catch them by surprise, as you would imagine. Quite honestly, as I said, I think they felt that generally they got side-swiped by this increase.

As I mentioned, hospital funding is of course a serious issue, and it was really interesting that the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit, which was supposed to help seniors live independently in their homes and make renovations to improve safety and accessibility, will end on January 1. We said this from the very beginning: If you're a senior and you're in your home and you've got the money to renovate, then you're going to do it anyway.

For the majority of seniors that we see, the majority of seniors that the community care access centres are trying to deal with—although, as the Auditor General pointed out, again, a lot of that money, 39% of it, goes to administration, bureaucracy and profit—are not in a position to undergo a major renovation and then, in turn, apply for a Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit. So seniors woke up on Friday and they weren't happy. They weren't happy for very good reasons.

The other piece I have to talk about is climate change cap-and-trade, because this is why the government said, "You know what? This is why we have to have this budget. Two months—we have to accelerate the budget process. We have to bypass and undermine the public consultation process." And yet, as I already mentioned last Thursday, the government introduced the needed piece of legislation, so there was no rush needed to move cap-and-trade forward.

As it is right now, though—while this is mentioned in the budget papers, it is not in the budget bill—if you look at the comparators between the way Ontario has addressed cap-and-trade and the way California did—for instance, when they announced this in California, they ensured that the large emitters, the large polluters, were part of the cap-and-trade model at the very beginning. Ontario has given the large emitters a three-year grace period—a window, if you will. This isn't including some of the—for instance, the concrete association. They've done a very good job of reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. It's one thing to acknowledge the progress that they have made; it's another thing altogether to do a broad sweep of large corporations in the province of Ontario and give them a three-year window when the impact of cap-and-trade is, obviously, a shared responsibility, and it is going to impact Ontario families, Ontario families who came to us and said, "High cost of food. High cost of electricity. High cost of transit. High cost of housing."

Cap-and-trade for us, on climate change—we have been very clear and we've been very consistent on climate change. The way that this plan is crafted as it is

right now, we have some serious issues around fairness. Giving large emitters a three-year grace period and then asking everyday Ontarians to come right to the table and start paying the price is, for us, a flawed model.

Not having specific targets: There are no greenhouse gas reduction targets attached to these programs, nor is there any requirement that the Environmental Commissioner audit the greenhouse gas reduction results.

You can't blame us, really, for having some confidence issues. The government already rolled out an energy retrofit program just shortly after Christmas, and they connected it to Enbridge and to Union Gas. We were really surprised in Kitchener, because Enbridge and Union Gas do not deliver gas to the entire city of Kitchener. The immediate concern was that they left out the entire city of Kitchener, and also parts of Kingston. Kingston has its own delivery model as well. But the Liberals have assured us that everything is going to be fine.

People in Kitchener want to be part of the energy retrofit. They want to be part of the solution. They want to take part in the energy retrofit model.

You've told us everything is going to be okay, so we're going to make sure—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's in our budget bill.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, it's not. It's not in the budget bill. That's my whole point. In fact, the budget bill is very light. It's a light budget bill, I have to tell you. The budget document—the budget papers—which came out last Thursday talks about a lot of things.

One of the things that it does talk about which actually brought some hope—I want to talk about something positive. The budget document did reference a review of the clawback of social assistance. It did. But it's not in the budget bill. I just want to point that out. See, if it were in the budget bill, I would have some confidence that the government was serious about doing it. But the clawback is—actually, it's interesting. It's on page 131, and it says, "Ontario will ... take steps to help increase the incomes of single-parent families who receive both social assistance and child support payments. Currently, families receiving child support have their social assistance benefits reduced"—we call it a clawback; you say "reduced"—"by the full amount of child support they receive." BC moved for a full ban last year.

I just want to tell you that at the budget consultations, there was a really interesting moment where one of the advocates said that the clawback essentially results in stealing from children. This was from the Hamilton area. Another delegate said, "Three quarters of everybody who's using a food bank are really receiving their main income source from the provincial government," which is a problem, right?

People want to work. We actually heard this from one of the delegates—

Mr. Paul Miller: Huge problem in Hamilton.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Especially with those who are disabled.

She said, "I want to work. I don't want to live on assistance. Nobody wants to collect welfare. Nobody

wants to be on ODSP, especially when basically it's a sentence to live in poverty."

Mr. Paul Miller: Peanuts.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

He goes on to say that those who are using food banks "are really receiving their main income source from the provincial government. In a very real sense, the provincial government is instituting hunger through its inability to fix the social assistance system." He implored this government to take action because "enough kids" are "using food banks in" Hamilton "alone to fill 270 classrooms."

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There was a 1.5% increase in social assistance; the advocates have some strong feelings about that. I think that, quite honestly, when you put that 1.5% in the greater context of what we've heard around poverty reduction in the province of Ontario, so much of this comes back to housing, because housing connects everything. When people are spending 50%, 60%, 70% of their so-called disposable income on housing, on shelter, it leaves nothing, really, afterwards.

That's why we were definitely disappointed to see that there's a \$20-million reduction in Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This is the time—aside from child care—to get serious about housing in the province of Ontario. The government has said, "We can't do that alone. We need our federal partners to come to the table." I'm all for that collaboration, but in the meantime, this government has held power since 2003, and the need for supportive housing has never been greater.

I'm working with a group of parents right now in my riding, three mothers who have adult children, men who are significantly disabled and on the autism spectrum and are high, high, high needs. They've pooled their resources and they've bought their own home, on the premise that the government would work in collaboration with them and provide the pooling of the funds to provide respite and to provide services. They're actually willing to come to the table with the capital costs, but this government would not even fund that pilot project.

So there are people in this province who have creative ideas, who are committed to making this province a better place and who understand that when you don't invest in solutions today, you pay more down the line. It's the same with health care, and it certainly is the same thing for education. For a government who has said that they're not cutting education, when you look through 2014, 2015, and then this year, 2016, and you see an in-year cut for the education sector on page 256 of \$430 million, cumulatively that's just over a billion dollars.

There is no good time to cut education. You never stop investing in education. It always makes sense to ensure that children have in this province—if we're actually going to build Ontario up, then a strong publicly funded education system is a key part of that. We were surprised, and I know the stakeholders are processing that to see how that funding is going to have an impact on education going forward.

But I go back to today's editorial, because there is this promise that has been made by the Minister of Finance: "'We're not going to leave anybody behind,' finance minister Charles Sousa assured Ontarians as he tabled his fourth budget." It goes on to say, "Kathleen Wynne promised when she became Ontario's 25th premier in 2013 to make social justice her top priority. Treasury Board president Deb Matthews, who presented the government's latest poverty reduction strategy ... said: 'We are recommitting to reducing poverty among children and youth through targeted investments and supports.'" Then the editorial goes on to say, "There was scant evidence to back up any of that in last week's budget."

Now, there are good places to always invest scant resources, if you will. In child care, the return on investment is always there; you can't go wrong with early learning and care. You can't go wrong with education.

The issue of special-needs students in our system right now—and there are a number of reasons why we have a better understanding of that student population: one is identification; two is that we just know better right now, we have better assessments. But when we found out through an FOI that there were 16,000 children on a wait-list for autism services, IBI and ABA—and we had to file an FOI on it—it was a shock. Our job as opposition members is to call the government out on where the funding is going, what promises they have made, what platitudes they have embraced and what press releases they have issued. But those 16,000 children—that was a real shock to us. Having that information allowed us to advocate for those children, for those families, and our critic Monique Taylor did an excellent job of drawing attention to it. I want to say that we were pleased to see that there was \$333 million over five years for autism services, although we still have some questions because it references in the document that you're going to redesign the system. Any time you say "redesign" or "modernize," we have some concerns, because it never really works out that well in those instances.

The other major thing that I have to mention—the time is going very quickly—is the energy file. I have to say that what we heard across the province is that the high cost of electricity and the high cost of energy impact everything, from the environmental perspective as well. Yet Hydro One and the sell-off of Hydro One were the number one issues that delegates addressed with us. They were very clear that they are not buying what the government is selling as it relates to the sell-off of Hydro One. They're not buying the broadening, the ownership language; you don't get more broad around ownership than the entire province. They don't buy the fact that this is going to financially benefit them down the line. They see it very clearly for what it is: a quick cash grab to meet the deficit reduction target of 2017-18. Now we even have the Financial Accountability Officer's report, which confirms that the year after 2017-18, we'll see an increase in the debt. It is a short-term policy that's going to have a long-term painful effect for the entire province.

I go back to the Auditor General's reports because I just want to point out that when you have reports like this

and then you have an opportunity to address a problem, one, you have to admit you have a problem and then two, you don't really have to admit it because the Auditor General did it for you. When this does happen, then you have a budget that you can actually use as a tool, if you will, a vehicle to address a systemic issue.

The Auditor General's report from December 2015 said that in 2004—this is a long-standing issue—the electricity system was restructured to provide for independent transparency planning, but over the last decade, this power system planning process has essentially broken down. We found no evidence that ministerial directives and directions were supported by public consultations or economic analysis disclosed to the public, which would be consistent with our experience with this budget.

It's really interesting, because once people start digging down and they sort of think more about where their energy is coming from, they're really surprised to find out that Ontario currently has an oversupply of electricity that could power Nova Scotia for the next five years.

This is from the Auditor General's report. Despite this oversupply, Ontario has spent \$2.3 billion in conservation programs from 2006 to 2014, and then no cost-benefit analysis was done to show that it would be better to import electricity in order to meet the demand than to procure additional generation capacity.

The AG goes on to say that the "OEB was not consulted in the privatization of Hydro One"—of course we knew that. We knew that nobody was consulted in the privatization of Hydro One. "With private investors interested in maximizing profits, it is uncertain what the impact on electricity prices will be. The OEB, the protector of consumer interests, was not consulted in this decision-making process."

The energy file could not be more messy. The lack of accountability, the lack of transparency, the lack of having any kind of empathy, at least with the consumers in this province, for having the highest electricity bills in Canada is just not there. The Auditor General finds that people and small businesses are paying 70% more on hydro bills because the Liberals sidestepped the OEB and ignored expert advice.

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She found so many problems with the CCACs that it would be a whole other new, hour-long lead.

She identified the CAS taking seven months to investigate possible abuse of children. Now the provincial advocate, God love him, is trying to dig down into the contracting out of group homes. These are our most vulnerable youth in the province. They are, essentially, homeless. They are wards of the state. They used to come under the care of the CAS, but now CASs contract out to for-profit companies to, basically, provide shelter. These youth are so at risk, and they have so many issues. The latest report the child advocate came out with indicates great abuse. That's what happens when profit drives the policy. When profit is the driver of the service, you see a disconnect.

Quite honestly, this government seems content to contract out almost all public services. We have never seen the level of privatization—not even under the Conservatives. The Liberals have taken the Conservative model and doubled down on it and accelerated it.

There was even a story in the paper this weekend that this government is thinking about privatizing, contracting out, the service of evictions, which is very much connected to the justice system. This model is in the United States. During the budget consultations, we faced the people who get evicted. They are primarily women; they are primarily children. They can't make their rent because their rents are so high—because there are no protections for renters—and because they can't find full-time work. They can only find precarious, part-time, contract work. Also, they are ensconced in a system of a broken social net. That's what we saw first-hand when we travelled around this province. So we truly have some issues with this budget.

The issue of the free tuition got a lot of attention. New Democrats are definitely supportive of any policy which increases access to education for low-income students across the province. In fact, we've been long-time advocates for addressing the overall costs in the PSE system. And yet, once again, the government calls something free which is not free. The government is only providing for the average tuition, which they consider to be \$6,160. However, Stats Canada has an average tuition of \$7,868. It's actually almost between \$8,000 and \$9,000. So we have some serious questions. We need greater clarification on this program. If the intent really is to increase access, then having a \$3,000 levy, if you will, to access the granting program—then you can't in all honesty call something free. You can't call something free when it is not. We're going to be peeling back the layers on this announcement and trying to address some of the weaknesses in this plan as it was rolled out. Of course, it was completely foreseeable that it was designed in this way. You can't build a policy on an average which is not accurate.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude my comments—there was a missed opportunity in this budget to address infection prevention. Class 1 was a company from Cambridge that submitted a delegation.

If this province is serious about creating a budget that actually will create jobs for today and tomorrow, then they need to do a better job of listening to the people that they serve, that we all serve, that we all have a responsibility to listen to, and then to apply that knowledge in a real and actionable way.

It is most unfortunate that this budget misses that mark on so many levels, despite some good intentions on some policies. With that, I look forward to the questions and comments and I look forward to the debate on this budget. Budgets are too important to not listen to the people of this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for her comments and the member previous who spoke for an hour, as well, on today's budget bill.

I will talk only briefly—I have two minutes here today—but there has been a fair amount of commentary that has been provided around electricity pricing in the province of Ontario. As is the convention in this place, the budgets allow members an opportunity to sort of stray from, perhaps, what may be the particular subject matter of the day; in this case, the budget. But I'm happy to make some comments on that, as well.

As I said, I only have about a minute and a half, but the one thing that I have said in this place in the past, on numerous occasions—and I think it bears repeating today—is that there were several commitments that were made years ago by all three political parties when it came to energy pricing in the province of Ontario. The costs that were associated with those commitments could not have been avoided by the Progressive Conservative Party and could not have been avoided by the New Democratic Party, just as they could not have been avoided by the Liberal Party.

I think it would be helpful, from time to time, if when the opposition parties—both of them—find opportunity to speak on electricity pricing in the province of Ontario, they might acknowledge at least that, in my opinion, anywhere from 60% to 80% of the increase in Ontario since we came to government would not have been avoided under any situation, no matter who was in government, unless they were going to stand down from the commitments that they had actually made going back to 2003, when I first ran. I remember them very clearly.

Speaker, I think it's fair that, on the energy pricing file, they are being disingenuous and selective in their memory—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It crosses the line. I would ask the member to withdraw.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, I withdraw. I apologize.

But I would say that I think there is a broader discussion that needs to be had and conveyed to people who are interested in this file; and, clearly, the opposition parties are not telling the whole story.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to continue this broader discussion. This budget measures act alone has something like 34 different schedules. I want to make reference to schedule 30. But what I find passing strange as I read through the various schedules is that the title on top is Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), but most of the schedules, as far as the membership of a university board of governors, really have nothing to do with jobs today or tomorrow.

Schedule 30 makes changes to the Tobacco Tax Act through this bill, Bill 173. The bottom line is that the price of a carton is going to go up \$3. In fact, it went up, I think it was, at 12:01 on the Friday morning after this budget measures act was tabled. I have a concern: That puts the price for a carton up to about \$90.

This government does recognize the problem with contraband. The reason for the problem with contraband is the very high taxation rate on tobacco, which means the legitimate players cannot compete with the illegal players, whether they be growers, manufacturers, processors or retailers; and nobody really in this province seems to be able to compete with organized crime.

So we've jacked up tobacco prices \$3 a carton. Within the black market, the math is really simple: Why pay \$90 when you can pay \$9? It's that simple.

To their credit, the budget papers themselves go on to deal with the underground economy, contraband tobacco, drugs and organized crime. I do give the government credit for taking that initiative.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I read the budget, and I understand that there's a small contribution the government is making to assist OW and ODSP, but with all due respect, the total amount may come to just over \$300 a year. I don't know what \$300 a year is going to do. It might pay for the groceries for two weeks. It really doesn't cut it.

I do remember, about six years ago, that Minister Matthews was in town—she was in a different portfolio at the time. She was in town and I was at that meeting. She promised all the people in Hamilton and all the poverty groups that she would reduce poverty by 25% in five years. Well, that didn't happen. It didn't even come close. So when she comes into town next time, I'm going to ask for an explanation of why she didn't meet her goals. She had five years to work on that, and we're no further ahead than we were. In fact, we're in worse shape.

I didn't hear any mention in this budget about helping the steel industry in this province—nothing. I didn't hear a word about helping out the province with the courts and US Steel and all the things that are going on—not a word. They have a pension insurance plan in this province, which other provinces don't have, but it's grossly under-funded. I don't see any money going into that fund. If a major company like US Steel or somebody went under, that plan might last a year and a half for the pensioners, for the amount of money that is in there, maybe two years. They put absolutely no money in to protect the pensioners, and that's a crucial problem in our province. I see nothing done about that.

You look at all the other issues that are going on in the province. They focused on infrastructure. I hope when they do the infrastructure projects, they're going to use Canadian steel made in Canada, instead of flooding the market with cheap, foreign steel and using it, which is on our docks in Hamilton, Toronto and Montreal. Cheap, foreign steel that's undercutting our jobs—and they're doing nothing about it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: How does the 2016 budget impact and benefit the people of the great riding of Etobi-

coke North? Let me count the ways. We have, as you know, major infrastructure plans. We have approximately a \$1.2-billion, eight-stop—count them, Speaker; eight stops—going through my riding of the Finch LRT. We have a \$90-million expanded student centre at Humber College, the north campus, which again is in my riding of Etobicoke North. We have a \$200-million-plus quadrupling of the footprint of Etobicoke General—a new cardiorespiratory centre, neurodiagnostic, maternal newborn, an NICU, emergency department.

Speaker, I can tell you that my residents are absolutely delighted, heartened and inspired by the commitment that our government has made to reduce—in fact, make free—college and university tuition fees for folks in families making less than \$50,000 annually.

These are all signs of a government on the move. I have to say that the extraordinary commitment to education, whether it's at the JK level, the kindergarten level and beyond—and now at the university and college level—really enhances, fortifies and changes the collective mind of Ontario.

This is an extraordinary development, and I have to salute Premier Wynne and her vision, and, of course, by extension, her caucus, who has helped to advise, configure and craft this extraordinary budget for these times.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Come to order.

The member for Kitchener–Waterloo has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much. So there you have it: You have that one world and that one vision of what this budget is. How I started this, in my two minutes, was just pointing out that many of the words and the ideas and the announcements are not contained within the budget bill. That, for me, is cause for concern, especially around poverty reduction and job creation.

The poverty reduction piece: If this government is going to move ahead with the clawback—because currently in the province of Ontario, every penny of the average \$280 monthly child support payment to families on social assistance is clawed back by the government. Delegates told us that that is literally taking food out of the mouths of children. Yet this government moved very quickly on the sell-off of Hydro One. On this proposal—if I'm to read this, because I don't have a budget bill that gives me a timeline—they're going to wait a whole other year to think about it, to create another round table, another task force and what have you. I don't think the most vulnerable people in this province can afford to wait.

When you look at the fact that this government can figure out how to claw back \$40 or \$50 from a single mother on social assistance, and yet when they hand out Ministry of Transportation road maintenance contracts and those companies don't deliver the service and the MTO issues \$49 million in fines, the MTO can't find a way to collect that \$49 million, this is fundamentally the disconnect of this government. This government can

figure out a way to take back \$40 or \$50 from the poorest people in the province of Ontario, yet they can't figure out how to design a contract for road maintenance, make sure those companies deliver the service and, once they're fined, collect those fines. That, in essence, is the disconnect between the Liberal government of Ontario and the rest of the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I would like to start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member from Ottawa South, the member from Etobicoke Centre and the Minister of Transportation. It is a great honour to rise today and to talk about Budget 2016: Jobs for Today and Tomorrow.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, this is a debate we're having, and I respectfully respect the opposition doing their job, but I certainly hope they will take this budget and bring it back to their ridings. I believe they'll find something for each and every constituent of theirs, because it is there. I would like to highlight some aspects of it that will have an impact not only for Ontarians, but for members of my community in Ottawa–Orléans.

I'm very proud that the Minister of Finance and our government delivered a budget that outlines a path to balance while investing in Ontarians and our communities. Our number one priority is growing the economy and creating jobs, and this is exactly what this budget will do.

We will help businesses create jobs by reducing red tape. As a former business person, I was happy to know that the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure will be launching the Red Tape Challenge, an online consultation tool designed to identify and eliminate duplication, lessen compliance burden, shorten response times and make it easier for businesses to interact with the government. By reducing the cost of doing business, we will help employers create more jobs, and they will continue to fuel the growth in Ontario's economy.

Our budget continues to make significant investments in our students, so they may create the jobs of tomorrow. We recognize the importance of post-secondary education as essential to the well-being of our province and our economy.

Je suis fière de voir que notre gouvernement will be improving access to post-secondary education to our youth. The new Ontario Student Grant will ensure that students who come from families that have an income of \$50,000 or less will have no fees for tuition. Again I say to my colleagues: How can that not have an implication for every single one of us? I think it's also important to say this is a new grant that is revenue neutral.

Avec la plus grande concentration francophone dans ma circonscription d'Ottawa–Orléans, je suis fière aujourd'hui de partager pour dire haut et fort que notre gouvernement investit dans leur futur. L'investissement dans notre collège La Cité, à Ottawa, bâtit un plus grand accès pour les francophones de ma communauté à une

éducation supérieure dans leur langue maternelle, et aidera aussi nos jeunes entrepreneurs pour la création d'un centre d'innovation et d'entrepreneuriat.

En investissant dans ce centre, nous investissons dans notre jeunesse francophone pour s'assurer qu'elle puisse faire profiter leurs entreprises ici-même, tout en les aidant à exporter leurs produits à l'échelle mondiale.

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We want families and people to have the best end-of-life care. This province has great newborn programs that help families care for their infants in their first moments in the world, but we still needed to do work on helping those seeking end-of-life care options.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, during our pre-budget consultation on the travelling finance committee, we heard about the investment and the need. I have to also pay respect to the member from Ottawa South, my colleague, who lobbied and asked and met several families across the province on that issue. I'm very happy to see that our government will be investing \$75 million in palliative care.

Another great investment in our budget—again, we may not hear this from the opposition—also addressed specialized health care for those who have suffered pregnancy loss. I wanted to highlight this today because as a friend, a family member, a mother and also a former social worker, I have known people who have gone through the silent tragedy of a miscarriage. For far too long, families were expected to just get over it, and many were left shattered. Stillbirth changes family and marriage, and as it stood, our health care system failed these people in a time of great need and suffering. That is why I am so proud that our government, through the advocacy of my colleague the member from Eglinton—Lawrence, will be providing \$1 million to support services for those affected by pregnancy and infant loss. That includes resources and training for the volunteers and support for the families and the parents.

One aspect I need to mention is the fact that vaccination for shingles will be offered free of charge for seniors between 65 and 70 years of age. I have to say, on Friday I was sharing this news with seniors in my community, and they applauded this, Mr. Speaker. Certainly this is something very important.

Another great thing I need to share today is the fact of our investment regarding the Special Needs Strategy. Over and over I've heard family members dealing with the issue of autism. It will mean a lot to the residents of my community and the families of my community—our \$333-million investment over five years in autism services.

I want to leave some time for my colleagues. They're going to start looking at me because I'm speaking too long and I'm getting the boo-boo, but I could talk and talk about how this budget is having a real impact in each of our communities. I'll leave the floor to the rest of my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: You got a haircut.

Mr. John Fraser: I got a haircut. Yes, I did.

It's a pleasure to speak after my colleague la députée d'Ottawa—Orléans. Merci.

I just simply want to say that this is a budget that I'm particularly proud of, not just for the investments that we made in hospice and palliative care—which I think are really important and I want to say a few words about—but there are another few things that I want to mention as well.

This Legislature received that investment in a way that sent a very clear message to the people out there in the communities who've been doing this work for years: the volunteers, the fundraisers, the practitioners. The reaction of the Legislature was really an indication of all the efforts that are being made in our communities to serve people at the end of their lives, to make sure people can die with dignity.

Community-based hospice palliative care is a community-based initiative that government supports. These investments will go a long way to help hospices—new hospices but also our existing hospices—continue to provide the services that they do.

We've talked about the other investments in health care—the member from Eglinton—Lawrence's bill on pregnancy loss: very important. It's not a big piece of the budget, but it's very important to families and communities.

The thing that I wanted to mention that I really, really think is a difference-maker in this budget is the investment in post-secondary education, increasing access for families who make \$50,000 or less and for families making between \$50,000 and \$83,000. About half of those families will see a really significant boost in support for tuition and education.

Really, what it does is it provides opportunity for all. We know that we're only going to be competitive if we have the smartest, most highly trained individuals. But we also know that opportunity is a thing that has not always been equal. I think this is the great equalizer. The investment in public transit is a great equalizer. It means that people can get to work, can get to appointments, can go shopping, can do a variety of things in an accessible way; and, hopefully, faster as well.

I also did want to mention the clawback and looking at a basic single income, which I think is a very progressive, important thing for us to do. It's something that's been talked about for a long time. I know that I'm very optimistic about the work going forward on that.

To the member from Waterloo: I want her to have faith. Believe. It's there. You may not see it everywhere, but it's there. I firmly believe that we'll work towards getting those things done. There is support on all sides of the House—just like there is for palliative care and things like infant loss. As I've said before—and I don't want to sound too Pollyanna, but I usually do—we share a lot more in common than we lead people to believe.

I just want to finish on that note, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm thrilled to get up and speak today about Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act. As I was walking up to my seat, some of my colleagues here on the government side were asking me what I was going to talk about. I told them I wasn't 100% sure yet, because the challenge isn't what to talk about, it's what you have to leave out when you've only got five minutes to talk. There's so much that I could say about this budget. There are so many good things in this budget, Speaker, not just for the people of Ontario, but for the people of my community in Etobicoke Centre, that I'm struggling to figure out how to condense it all.

So I want to just spend a few minutes talking about some points that I thought were particularly exciting for my constituents in Etobicoke Centre. I wanted to also share with you that when the budget came out, I thought a lot about how I was going to communicate about the budget in my community and to people I thought would be interested. Instead of holding a budget breakfast, like I've done in the past, what I decided to do is take future events that my constituency team is already planning to organize—we have a youth advisory group meeting coming up; we have a seniors' advisory group meeting coming up. On Saturday, we had a Patients First consultation where we talked about the various transformations to health care that our government has planned. We decided to add the budget to the agenda of each of those, because I firmly believe that for each of those groups of folks, there are really important points here that will enhance their quality of life.

Just a couple of things that I spoke about on Saturday to the folks who came to the Patients First consultation where we were talking about how to improve health care: I actually walked them through the key elements of the budget as far as health care goes. The first thing I talked to them about was the investments in hospital care, about the plan to provide \$12 billion over 10 years in capital grants to hospitals.

In my community of Etobicoke Centre—we have a hospital just north of us, in the riding of my colleague from Etobicoke North, called Etobicoke General Hospital. It's receiving funding; in fact, shovels will be in the ground very shortly to help expand Etobicoke General.

Interjection.

Mr. Yvan Baker: That's right, a significant amount of money that will enhance the care that people receive, the quality and accessibility of care in my community. That was one thing we talked about, as well as the increase in funding to hospitals.

Another thing I wanted to talk about was the steps that have been taken in community care. Community care is critical in my community. I represent a riding where we have one of the largest populations of seniors of any riding in the province, so community care is critical; not only so we can provide care when people want it and when they need it, but in a more cost-effective way, frankly, that liberates health care resources to help those

who need a hospital and to reduce those wait times and provide them with a better quality of care. So the investments in community care, the increasing of funding by 5% every year, was critical.

Another thing, Speaker, that came up that we talked about a lot was what the government's doing to manage our finances. One of the things I heard about during the election campaign was the importance of making sure that we make important investments but that we are also in a position financially where we can support the programs that the people of Ontario care about. Some of the folks whom I spoke to over the weekend—some of them were at my Patients First consultation. Some of them were some young people that I had the privilege of going to Guelph to visit and speak to in the riding of my colleague Minister Sandals. One of the things that we talked about a lot was how important it was that we work towards a balanced budget 2017-18, that we balance the budget in 2017-18, because by doing that, we are helping to secure our financial future, which allows us to make the investments in infrastructure, the investments in health care, the investments in community care and the investments in a range of items that will enhance the quality of life for the people of our communities.

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One of the things that I'm really proud of is being one of the many members of a team on Treasury Board, led by Minister Deb Matthews. There are others here who are on Treasury Board, including Minister Sandals, who have worked so hard, along with the staff and the members of the public service, to get us to where we are today, Speaker, where we are way ahead of schedule as far as balancing our budget, and that's excellent news. Again, it shows that not only are we doing this in a way to make sure that our fiscal house is in order, but we're spending tax dollars more wisely. I think a really important element of this, too, is that people—the taxpayers—can take comfort that we're working hard to get better bang for the buck. That's something, as I heard from my constituents and when I was speaking over the weekend, that people in my community and Etobicoke Centre valued very much.

I think the last thing I'll highlight, and then I'll pass it on to our Minister of Transportation, is that there are a number of elements in this budget that are called "Making Everyday Life Easier." I affectionately refer to this section of the budget as the Mike Colle section of the budget. It's making everyday life easier, with things like eliminating the Drive Clean fee and things like capping hospital parking fees. These are the kinds of things that show that, as a government, we're listening and we're working hard to do just that: to make people's lives better.

Speaker, I'm very proud of this budget. I will pass it on to the minister. But I believe that there is so much to talk about, so much that all members on both sides of this House should talk about to their respective constituents. This is a budget that makes our constituents' lives better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's always an honour to have an opportunity to lend my voice to the debate that takes place here in this chamber and to follow immediately after colleagues, two representing Ottawa, of course, and our other colleague from Etobicoke Centre, all of whom spoke very eloquently about a number of the important aspects of this year's Ontario budget.

It's interesting. I know I could spend some time going through a number of the highlights in the budget. Of course, there are several pages that are devoted to the transportation and transit infrastructure investments that this Ontario government has been making, and will continue to make, that will help support communities right across the province of Ontario.

Earlier today, we heard one of the NDP members from Hamilton. If I understood some of the banter, Speaker, he was complaining that there was nothing in the budget specifically towards Hamilton or with respect to Hamilton. In this budget document, right here on page 69, there's an explicit reference to the Hamilton LRT, which this government is working with that community to fund. In addition, what's not mentioned in the budget is the extension of GO Transit service specifically to Stoney Creek, which is in that particular member's riding.

I would say to that member, and all members of both the NDP and the Conservative caucus, that it's important at this point in time—even though, on this side of the House, we all understand and respect the role that opposition has to play in our democracy, I think if people looked at this budget through what I'll call, I guess, a non-partisan lens—

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: An objective lens.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —an objective lens. Thank you very much to the member from Etobicoke North, who, I should point out, is 100% right about the fact that we are building an LRT along Finch, through two of Toronto's priority communities, from the new subway station that is being built as part of the Spadina subway extension at Keele and Finch, all the way out to Humber College in Etobicoke North, with a number of stops that will provide tremendous uplift for that community and for this entire region, in terms of helping to create and enable additional connectivity.

But as I was saying earlier, I think that if members from both the Conservative and NDP opposition would take a look at this budget through an objective filter, or through an objective lens, they would understand that cutting across the investments that we're making, cutting across the fiscal responsibility that the finance minister has brought with respect to announcing that this will be the last budget that we have where we show a deficit, and that we will balance next year, while at the same time helping to massively expand access to post-secondary education, while we continue to invest in health care, education and critical infrastructure—all of this really and truly is a road map to build a brighter economic future for the people of Ontario, to create jobs and to significantly enhance quality of life, whether you live in the GTHA or you live in communities like Thunder Bay,

Windsor, Hamilton, London or Guelph. There are so many wonderful communities across this province that I know are extremely happy with the notion that this budget puts forward: that we want to keep building the province up and we want to keep moving the province forward.

The only thing I would say, not so much in response to the debate that has taken place here this afternoon but in response to some of the questioning that we saw earlier today in question period, which of course was our first question period opportunity since the budget was tabled last Thursday: To watch the leaders of both the Conservative Party and the NDP put forward their questions, and also others in their respective caucuses ask questions of our government, it strikes me that there seems to be a great deal of confusion amongst both opposition parties about how it's possible that we have found that solution, that we've found that way forward, that we continue to invest, that we continue to be progressive on this side of the House, that we continue to build the province up, and at the same time, we brought that significant degree of fiscal responsibility and will be balancing the books by next year, as the finance minister has said. I can only tell my friends and colleagues on the other side of the House, from both parties, that this is the kind of budget that you create when you're open-minded, when you're progressive and when, in fact, you listen to the people of Ontario.

I'm very proud of Ontario budget 2016. I'm proud to serve under the leadership of Premier Kathleen Wynne.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Again, I'm happy to rise to talk about Bill 173, the recent Liberal budget that was presented at the Legislature here last week. I want to come back to what I was saying earlier, and that is about the \$308-billion debt. I think it's the greatest risk we have to economic prosperity in this province.

There are some outstanding numbers out of the finance minister's budget this year. I hit on it earlier. Roughly, the \$308-billion debt represents \$22,000 for every man, woman and child living in Ontario. This is the ninth straight budget where this government has failed to balance the books. Along the way, they've doubled the accumulated debt and driven our debt-to-GDP ratio from 27% to over 40% here in Ontario. Take into perspective some of the past debt numbers: 30 years ago, in Ontario, the debt was around \$30 billion; nine years ago, it was \$153 billion—and in this budget, \$308 billion. That is frightening for the people of Ontario, especially for the future generations in this province.

Mr. Speaker, that's why, last week, because of the budget that was coming, I introduced my private member's bill to set a debt ceiling on the debt in the province, to cap Ontario's debt. I really hope that the finance minister and the Liberal government will consider that. I think it's a sensible, reasonable approach to force politicians of all stripes and the government of the day to consider the spending priorities that they have. I think all

of us, as politicians, have a responsibility to the next generation, to our children, not to put this burden on that generation of the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Indeed, it is a pleasure to stand on behalf of the good people in Windsor–Tecumseh and make some observations on what we've heard this afternoon.

It shouldn't come as a surprise to my Liberal colleagues that I did not wear my rose-coloured glasses today, so I'll give you a bit of a cold, hard reality check about the haves and the have-nots.

In the Windsor area, 70,000 people who have jobs are making less than \$20,000 a year. More than a third of our seniors are living on less than \$20,000. One third of our single moms are living in poverty. One out of every 10 people you pass on the street in Windsor and Essex county is living in poverty. One out of every six kids lives in poverty. Our food banks served about a third of their meals to children. One in every 10 adults accessing food banks in Ontario is employed; they have a job and they still have to go to the food bank. The average life expectancy of a homeless person in Ontario is 39 years.

We are a culturally diverse community in Windsor and Essex county; 24% of our population identify themselves as immigrants, yet many of the new immigrants face economic challenges. They can't find jobs, and about half of these folks are not working at the moment.

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In our region, our youth unemployment rate peaked in 2012 at 24.3%. It was down in 2014 to 16.5%—still totally unacceptable. So we're losing our young people. They're leaving our area to look for work elsewhere. We've lost about 10,000 young people, Speaker, over the past 15 years. That is a significant blow to Windsor and Essex county, and this budget does nothing to bring them back home to their families.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I want to compliment my colleagues who have spoken in regard to this budget. We heard from two members from the Ottawa area. The member from Ottawa–Orléans spoke about the investments in post-secondary education, of l'importance de la francophonie dans notre province and in regards to the shingles vaccine.

The member from Ottawa Centre spoke about palliative care and about the infant loss supports that we will be putting in and that we heard about during our travels with SCOFEA that have great importance to many families.

The member from Etobicoke Centre spoke about the investments in health care, in hospitals and community care, but especially in regards to managing our finances well.

I have to say that the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is fearmongering. He's talking about what's frightening. What's frightening is not thinking of a future

for our young generation, not investing in our future and trying to create jobs, growing the economy and thinking of our environment so we can leave this province in a better situation than we found it in.

To the member from Windsor–Tecumseh: He spoke a lot about poverty, and we know that that area of the province is undergoing very difficult times. But that's why we're increasing social assistance rates. That's why we're focusing on the most vulnerable—again, the importance of creating jobs.

I didn't mention the member for Vaughan, our Minister of Transportation. He spoke about the investments that we're making in infrastructure and in transportation. I know that in my riding we have different projects that are happening and that surround my riding. We have the Kitchener GO line and the Barrie line. We hope to see all-day, two-way GO. And then we had the good news on the UP Express this week.

We have to continue to invest in our future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments for this—oh, sorry, it doesn't. I apologize. The member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: We're so eager to comment on these speeches here that sometimes we get carried away because there's so much in this budget that bothers us.

I first wanted to talk about the comments from the member from Ottawa South. Certainly I commend his efforts on the hospice and palliative care. I was a member of our local hospice board in North Perth and my wife is currently a board member of the hospice. I know the work that they do and how important it is to the community, so I want to thank you for your efforts.

The bothersome part about this whole thing is that the debt that is projected is building up to \$308 billion. Speaker, that is more than twice what this government inherited when they first came to power in 2003. If we are to continue on with the social programs that we're used to in this province, when we continue to build up these debt loads, one of these days it's just not going to happen. We're going to have to face the music that we can't afford some of these things. We need to protect our health care systems. We need to protect all these values that we deem important in this province, but in continuing to build up a debt like this government has done, one of these days it's not going to happen. We're going to have to face some real hard facts that we can't afford some of these things.

I think that is what has got Ontarians bothered. I had comments this weekend from people who had watched the budget speech last week: "How much money do we have to borrow before this government finally realizes that it's unaffordable?"

Like I say, there are things in it that I compliment the government on, but certainly their budget and their projections on debt are not one of them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for Ottawa–Orléans.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I see on this side of the House a lot of commitment to continue to grow our economy and create the jobs for today and tomorrow. Certainly, I hear and I know that in some parts of Ontario, there is still a need to continue that part of the investment. But when I hear the opposition party, the PC Party, talking about their plan, I see no plan. I really don't see a plan. Actually, I was saying that I would call it the fiscal fantasyland.

When I first took office in 2014, I saw a budget that really was going to transform—the biggest infrastructure investment in the history of this province. We continue to do so. Our investment is \$116 billion over 12 years, and \$15 billion of that investment will be dedicated for outside of the GTHA. I wanted to speak on that because, during my campaign, I strongly supported phase 2 of an LRT in my community of Ottawa–Orléans. I was very happy to see that in this budget, there is that reference that an LRT could be considered with cost-sharing between the municipality and our federal partner. We will continue that aspect.

I want to reflect back a little bit. When it comes to our plan to balance the books, we hear from the opposition that we are creating a lot of frightening aspects in the province. I just want to mention something. When I first was elected, these members were actually campaigning on a plan to balance the books by firing 100,000 people. I have to say that their current leader was actually there—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm going to start off by offering a minute of praise to my colleague Vic Fedeli from Nipissing. He's our finance critic, he's the former mayor of North Bay and he's a very successful businessman and entrepreneur. Frankly, he does not need to be here. He's here because he cares. He's here because he wants to make a difference for the people of Ontario. I'm thankful to have him in our caucus and am privileged to serve with him.

He always looks at every issue. He has been our critic and does a bang-up job in looking through all of the areas with a balanced outlook. He's trying to find positives, but at the end of the day, he also puts some thought processes forward for this government.

He asked three things: He wanted energy rates to be controlled and brought down wherever possible; he wanted to make sure there was a lot better improvement of front-line health care; and he wanted to see some control of the debt. Really, none of those was significantly covered in this budget.

I want to suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act—about the only way I could get my head around that title really being appropriate is that our children and our grandchildren are going to have a job of digging out of debt for their entire lifetime. That's not a good statement to be making to start off my speech.

I'm going to give the government credit in regard to, at first glance, there being funding in there for autism;

good news, in some cases, for the less privileged for tuition fees; money for hospices; hospital administration and operational funding; and some infrastructure funding. Those are good things that I found in the budget. I can support those because I believe they're going to help our people in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and across this province.

However, I think you have to look beyond just the baubles that they put in the window to make people kind of forget the rest of the details of the budget. This government is spinning a disingenuous narrative. The promises that they continue to make—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You can't use that word, "disingenuous." I would ask the member to withdraw.

1700

Mr. Bill Walker: My apologies. I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The key promises are not what they seem and appear to be once you start looking at the detail in the rest of the document. Once you get up close to the details hashed out inside of the 346 budget papers, it really begins to take its true shape. They give with one hand and they take away with the other.

Ask the people of Ontario: "After 12 years of this Liberal government—after this budget—are you better off?" I think we know the answer to that, if people really look at the whole picture and really look back and say, "Am I better off, every day of my life?"

The promise of a free education or free tuition, to quote from the finance minister, isn't really free if you look at all the details. I think people have been led with that myth: "My son or daughter is going to get an absolutely full pour for education here." That's not the case, if you read through the budget.

What he didn't say in the speech is that this promise covers only the cost of "average" tuition, a very specific word put in there. He didn't say that it applies only to the provincial portion of education costs—again, very specific if you read the detail. And it covers only those students whose family income is under \$50,000. The details are on page 104: "Ontario's student aid transformation will make average tuition free for students with financial need from families with incomes of \$50,000 or lower...."

If it was truly free tuition, as the minister said in his speech on Thursday, then the budget papers would not be using the words "average tuition free." Read the detail, Mr. Speaker. What this means is that the Liberal government will cover about \$4,000, and whatever remains will still have to be paid by the student. This could be \$2,000 more, \$5,000 more—who knows?—depending on the course of learning. So, again, it's not exactly as it appears in the 30-second sound bite.

Furthermore, this funding criteria applies to about 30% of the students, if even that. I very much applaud any government, of any stripe, that's going to help those less fortunate, those people that truly need our support to give them that hand up. Education, as we know, is pivotal

to the success of a person throughout their lifetime. But at the end of the day, let's not sell them a bill of goods that says, "Everything is free-pour here," when at the end of the day that's not going to be. That's going to disappoint a lot of people. A significant number of students won't be able to receive any or full funding for college or university.

On the question of strengthening education, as the Liberal government likes to spin it, I want to add that there was also nothing in the budget to help keep our small, rural schools from closing. My riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is facing massive closures under the Liberal government's new education agenda. This agenda threatens to wipe out as many as 18 schools, affecting 5,000 student spaces. That's over one third of the total number of schools overseen by the Bluewater District School Board.

In my opinion, closing a school is a quick fix when they're facing an antiquated school funding formula that has created a plethora of problems in the education system. As I've always said, for too long, students in rural and northern Ontario have been cheated out of the resources they need to succeed, because this government—this Liberal government—has at no time reviewed the school funding formula. I do not see anything in this budget to help stop rural schools from closing. This inaction is especially disappointing to parents, who heard your government promise in the last three provincial elections that it would not only review but also fix the funding formula.

So, again, I stand here. I fought two elections with this as a key point, and then each time they've come out, just before election, with "we'll review; we'll fix." We're not there still, and those schools, sadly, are probably going to end up closing, despite us trying to fight as much as we can and bring this government back to the table, to say, "You're shutting down rural Ontario. You're taking the very fabric of a community out, in many cases, by closing that school."

The provincial funding formula drives how the money the board receives is spent. To this effect, the trustees of Bluewater District School Board passed a motion to essentially remind the government of its promise to review and fix the formula. The resolution said, "Be it resolved that Bluewater District School Board urges the government to move forward with a review of all grant categories to ensure that the funding model aligns to actual cost drivers, and the government review the funding model in its entirety to ensure that all school boards are receiving an adequate and equitable level of funding and that OPSBA continue to advocate for a fair funding model through whatever avenues are most appropriate, and a copy of the motion be forwarded to all public school boards represented by OPSBA."

A promise made, in my world, is a promise to be kept, not just election fodder. The school—a school—in any rural or northern community is a focal point. For its people, the school may be the only place where they have contact with other local people. As such, the school is the heart of their community.

Another major concern is that this policy of the Liberal government on school closures is also putting us on the brink of the largest downsizing of our public school system ever undertaken by any government in Ontario. This new vision certainly runs contrary to the principles of Dr. Egerton Ryerson, Ontario's founding father of public education, and one the Minister of Education herself emphasized in her maiden speech back in 2003. Again, I did not see anything in the budget that reiterated the campaign promises of saving community schools across rural and northern Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents really wanted to hear a plan about making energy rates affordable. How many times have we, my colleagues and members of the third party, stood in this House and told people and this government about the hardship that their energy policies are causing families in Ontario?

Two winters ago, in my riding, as many as 60 households were cut off from hydro because families were unable to pay the bill. It's simply not acceptable. And knowing that they're going to double or triple—and there's no apology from them at all. They just say, "Sorry about your luck. Drive on. Suck it up." It's just not right. We wanted to see something in this budget that said they are actually listening to the people of Ontario and addressing this need.

It's not just the low-income households that are struggling. The skyrocketing rates are also hitting the middle class, seniors on fixed incomes, public institutions, places like hospitals, schools, libraries, recreation centres. Mr. Speaker, their operational costs cannot be controlled when hydro is doubling and tripling. I am sure you're hearing it in your riding. I'm sure everyone in here is seeing this. It may be non-direct to some people but at the end of the day, it's starting to come home. People are starting to realize how much this is—and there are nurses being fired from hospitals across this province because they have to balance their budgets, and those fixed energy prices are a huge part of that.

Businesses of all sizes are telling me, "I just can't find Ontario to be affordable anymore. I cannot come back here and be competitive." I have businesses saying, "I want to expand but I am hesitant. If they're going to double and triple—plus bring in the ORPP plus more red tape—I'm just not certain this is where I want to do business." That's sad. Mr. Fedeli shared with us a company that spent \$100 million on a greenhouse. He was over the moon; he thought it was here. But no, they went to Ohio, I believe it was, because of this uncompetitive marketplace that this government has created over their 12 years.

Consider the rate hikes since they took power in 2003: over \$1,000 a year. The Auditor General said we pay on average 12 cents per kilowatt today compared to three cents across other jurisdictions.

We also pay a litany of surcharges, the worst of which is the global adjustment, fees that the Auditor General said cost Ontario's 1.3 million customers \$37 billion in overpayments in just nine years. That's on page 94 of the

2015 AG's annual report. Compare this to pre-2003, when Ontarians were paying four cents per kilowatt. If the average residential consumption is 1,000 kilowatts per month, this means we went from paying around \$480 per year in 2003 to paying just shy of \$1,500 a year today for just the energy consumed. Most people can't take those kinds of increases and just keep rolling along. When you add on the distribution charges and other fees, your average bill is even higher.

This budget touts the Ontario Electricity Support Program that may save a family about \$30 a month if they qualify. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you this is, again, a little bit of Liberalnomics. They give you a break of \$360—of your own money, by the way—and charge you \$1,000 more and think the world is rosy: "It's all good; we're leading the world here." This theory has resulted in the Liberal government being responsible for \$308 billion in debt, the highest in our province's history.

Page 156 says, and again I quote: "The Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP) is available to provide an ongoing credit directly on the electricity bills of eligible low-income households, as of January 1, 2016. Qualifying low-income Ontarians are eligible to apply for and receive a monthly credit of \$30 to \$50...."

I spoke with my constituents about the support program and here are some of the complaints I heard: A majority was told their application wasn't filled out properly. They were told they didn't sign the form in the right space and on the right line. They were locked out of the application process when they tried to make corrections to the application online. Filling out the application is absolute confusion. A number of constituents said that the agencies helping out with the application process were just as confused and unsure of where to report income tax. Is it line 206 or 226? Mr. Speaker, it's a challenge.

Pat Morris of Hanover—and I credit her; she's on the local radio station and she holds me accountable—said, "It's pretty obvious that if you have a computer and printer to get the application form, you are in; but if you don't, then you are out. Most people, seniors in particular, who are living on \$28,000 or less a year, are lucky to be able to afford a phone, let alone Internet service and a computer. All in all, this program is a joke."

Mr. Speaker, as I said in this House last week, we presented the government with our key budget asks that would give families cheaper energy rates, better front-line health care services and put the province on a path to paying down the debt. All three recommendations are reasonable, responsible and achievable, but most importantly, they are the priorities of my constituents of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and what they need and want this government to address immediately.

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These recommendations were also part of our effort to ensure that this Liberal government does not cut another \$54 million in health care funding, as they did in last year's budget. How many long-term-care beds could that

\$54 million have built? How many of the 24,000 seniors on the wait-list could have been paired with a bed if you'd invested that money in long-term care?

I will give the government credit for listening to the recommendations of the long-term-care association with regard to making annual investments in Behavioural Supports Ontario, but where's the rest of what they had promised for long-term care?

You have 309 long-term-care homes in Ontario that were built to 1970s design standards and that are crumbling. You have 30,000 beds that need to be rebuilt, that you promised to rebuild—yet again, a promise made and, sadly, a promise broken.

You have 24,000 seniors without access to a nursing bed—a wait-list that will double in six or seven years, to 50,000-plus seniors. Where is their plan to build new beds? Even if you build the beds you promised, and no one trusts that you will do so, what about the doubling of seniors? The baby boomers are moving forward. They are getting up in years, and they are coming at us like a tsunami. Everyone has known about this for years, and yet today we still have to challenge the associate minister, asking her for a credible plan.

Their budget dedicated a mere 70 words to this critical file. Page 120 reads:

"The province is continuing to improve the long-term-care homes sector.... the government will increase its investment in resident care needs by 2% a year over the next three years.

"Beginning in 2016-17, the government will invest an additional \$10 million annually in Behavioural Supports Ontario, for initiatives to help residents with dementia and other complex behaviours and neurological conditions."

Mr. Speaker, we've spoken to the long-term-care association. We've spoken to the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. They want quality food, they want a minimum four hours of care, and they want better supports. So what did the government do? Again, they put a bauble in the window. Ten million dollars sounds good if you purposely don't tell people—the reality is much, much more significant than what's really required to just maintain care at that level. The 2% increase in resident care needs is welcome, but I trust that the government realizes this increase will be eaten up by rising operating costs and exorbitant hydro costs. More importantly, it falls short of the 14% increase in the homes' operating costs, as indicated by the Ontario Long Term Care Association.

Mr. Speaker, this is another prime example, typically at budget time, of "dangle the carrot, snatch the plate" Liberalnomics, yet again. They are spin masters. If I'm going to give them any credit, they are definitely spin masters at the feel-good statement. But I suggest to the people of Ontario, be wary of the details. We have to look beyond just the 10-second headline. They like to put out fancy baubles, aspirational goals and even stretch goals. But do you know what? The people will see through this because reality is starting to come home.

When they're not able to find the services in their hospitals, when they're not able to get long-term-care homes, when they're not able to find mental health resources for their children and their family members, that's a result of overspending, mismanagement and huge, horrific waste—billions of dollars that could be going there.

And that's not even to talk about, Mr. Speaker, them adding to the gigantic debt burden that they have created in their 12 years. We spend \$12 billion a year just on interest payments. Every day in my office, on the street or out at public events, when people say to me, "What could be different?"—I could say to you that they could live within their means like you do with your home budget. You could have that \$12 billion to put into programs and services to help the less fortunate. Our students, our educational system, our health care could be transformed, to make sure that we get all of the funds we need.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier in my comments, they dangle the carrot and they take the plate. Let's just look at a couple of prime examples.

Hospital funding: They put in \$345 million, but what they didn't share with you very publicly is that they actually cut \$107 million annually that's raised through the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. There has been a five-year freeze to those hospitals, and their energy—they're still predicting they're going to triple over the next four years. So that's going to eat up that increase in a pretty short period. Then, they're going to throw on the ORPP, which again is going to have a huge, significant impact on operations like hospitals.

Long-term care—again, resident care: "We're going to give you 2% more a year." That's wonderful, except the true physical need just to maintain the services is 14% in increased costs that this government has imposed.

Seniors: A free vaccine—but they cut the home renovation tax credit so that people could live in more affordable homes.

And they continue to bring out beer and wine as the little bauble in the window; meanwhile, they're selling Hydro One.

I've challenged the minister responsible for long-term care to release her plan for building new nursing home beds. I asked, "If you could commit to 30,000 beds, surely to goodness you could tell me where and when the beds would be built?" Mr. Speaker, I got deafening silence.

Another critical component of long-term care the budget fell short on was safe staffing levels. We hear this over and over. We heard, in pre-budget hearings, testimonies from front-line staff for safer staffing levels to stem the rise of patient attacks in long-term-care homes.

Just this morning, my office took a call from 87-year-old Shirley Turnbull, who called to voice the same concerns. She said the staff looking after her were overwhelmed, stressed out and unable to tend to her needs properly. The fact that Ontario's nursing homes have lower staffing levels than any other jurisdiction across Canada and globally is appalling.

Mr. Speaker, small and rural municipalities are curious to know if the Liberal promise to spend \$160 billion on infrastructure over the next 12 years means you'll actually start approving projects this time. How many times is this Liberal government going to re-announce this? How many shovels are actually going to hit the ground, so that we can see the results of all of this? In my riding, I have yet to hear from one municipality that was approved for small-communities funding. After receiving applications for water, sewer, airports and even broadband infrastructure projects, this Liberal government approved none of them.

This budget is really going to hit families and seniors hard in the pocketbook. This budget may have sounded good at first glance, but in the end, Ontarians across the board will pay more. The cost of living is going to go up after this budget is passed. Drug deductibles for seniors will nearly double, from \$100 to \$170 starting in August, which means that you are making medications more expensive.

A 4.3-cent-per-litre hike in gasoline prices, a \$5-per-month increase in natural gas and propane, 4.7-cent-per-litre increase in diesel—Ontarians are going to feel the impact of the Liberal cap-and-trade plan every day. We support climate control, but what I want to see this government do is to ensure that those dollars are put into a trust fund that actually goes to address climate control, not a slush fund to help them balance their budget, on which they have overspent egregiously.

Mr. Speaker, we asked, and they say they're listening. Some 80% of Ontarians do not want them to sell Hydro One; they want them to hold on to that asset and ensure that the money is there when they need it. Short-term gain for long-term pain.

We wanted lower hydro prices, we wanted better and sustainable health care and we wanted them to address the debt. They've put a lot of baubles in the window, and there are some little, minor good pieces if you take them away from the whole of this budget, but at the end of the day, we really feel that this government has yet again missed the train to rein in their overspending and ensure that Ontarians' needs are put first.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. He does his homework, and he certainly comes out with some good points. Congratulations on your submission.

Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned. There's going to be a lot of money put into infrastructure over the next nine to 10 years, according to the Liberal government. What I'm concerned about is the procurement programs of the province. What I want to see in those procurement programs is some protection for Ontario trades and crafts, and also for management companies.

I'll give you an example. We had a bit of a horror story in Hamilton with the new stadium. It still isn't completed, a year and a half after it should have been completed. We had a French company managing, and

then the sub-trades below them. This company has made a mess of that stadium.

You're telling me that in Ontario and Canada, we don't have companies big enough to build a stadium? We don't have companies in Canada that can take on these types of projects? Who built Vancouver? Who built Calgary? Who built the Montreal Olympics? A lot of Canadian companies.

So why are we continually giving contracts to foreign companies? Some of our contractors are not getting the work; they're subcontracting to people from out of province or out of the country. These new trade deals that we're signing, is there any protection, or can they bring in whoever they want, displace our workers, our people, from good-paying jobs?

This government says it's going to create all these hundreds of thousands of jobs over the next 10 years. That's great, if the jobs are in Ontario, for the people who live in Ontario and who pay the taxes that are paying for the projects that are being built. That's what I want to see, and I don't see any of that in any of their contracts. Until that happens, I think there could be a lot of questioning of the spending of money: Who is it going to, where is it going to, and when is it going to come home?

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's always a pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents in my riding of Cambridge to add my comments on their behalf to the debate.

I was listening very carefully to the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. One of the things that he mentioned was the possibility of school closures. This is a reality amongst our rural communities, where there is declining enrolment. On page 160 in the budget book, we are showing that we are continuing our support of community hubs. Community hubs are using some of those spaces in order to be able to consolidate services. For instance, you can use this space for a consolidation of services such as social, legal, medical and dental services under one roof. We're continuing our support in that direction. So I'm fairly proud of that. The reality is that there is declining enrolment in some of our rural schools.

The other thing that I wanted to talk about: The member was talking about long-term-care beds. I know that, under the last Conservative government, they closed 28 hospitals and shut over 7,000 beds in Ontario. When this government came in in 2003, they invested heavily to try and replace some of that as our burgeoning senior population was coming through—the baby boomers. It took a lot to replace some of those.

We are delivering on our commitment to ensure that long-term-care beds are being renovated from four-bed to two-bed units. It's over a 10-year period. I'm very proud of Hilltop nursing home in my riding of Cambridge, which underwent expansion and renovation from four-bed to two-bed units a few years ago. Our other long-term-care facility in Cambridge is doing their planning right now to undergo that.

So I'm proud of this government. I'm proud of the investment in health care and that we are on track to balancing the budget in 2017-18.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorne Coe: My congratulations to the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for his very cogent and eloquent remarks on the budget.

Earlier today in question period, Mr. Speaker, we had some discussion about seniors and the effect of the government's action in the budget on seniors, particularly as it relates to seniors having to pay substantially more for their prescriptions. Isn't it ironic that we have, on one hand, an aging demographic across the province and we have a government that put in place a seniors' strategy which is clearly failing, and yet we have a budget that comes forward and asks seniors to pay substantially more for their prescriptions?

For example, the deductible for the Ontario Drug Benefit Program for seniors goes up from its current level of \$100 to \$170, and individual prescriptions will go up as well. That, overall, is an effect on seniors that is going to affect their quality of life, particularly in the riding that I represent in Whitby-Oshawa.

Turning for a moment, Mr. Speaker, also, to the government cancelling the tuition and education tax credit two years before they implement a new student grant: University and college students overall will be out \$165 million in financial support. Clearly, this caucus supports improving access to education. That being said, 70% of Ontario families aren't eligible for the full benefit of the Ontario Student Grant.

Another important sector of my riding in Whitby-Oshawa is the agricultural sector, and we have in the budget for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs—it's going to be cut by \$27 million as compared to last year.

Taken together, the effect is poor, and, in effect, that's going to be contrary to what residents in Whitby-Oshawa want.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in the House and, today, to respond to the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. As most of us do, he referred to a lot of issues that are happening in his riding due to this budget, and I commend him for it.

I also had the opportunity to listen to the member from Etobicoke North, and he also commented on the great things that were happening in his riding because of the budget, how transit was increasing and all of these things. You know what? That's a good thing. There are lots of people there. No problem.

Also, no one should accuse the NDP of not being in favour of reducing carbon. We're fully in favour. Having said that, the people in northern Ontario who are going to have to pay 4.3 cents more for gas, what they want to know is where that money is going to go. My constituents don't have the option of all this new transit, like

what's happening in Etobicoke North. Actually, our transit, as we speak, is being cut, so people are actually having less chance to use public transit.

The last time I checked, for someone who has to drive 50 kilometres to work, just because the budget has been announced, it doesn't mean that it's now 45 kilometres to drive to work. It's still 50 kilometres. So someone who has to drive 50 kilometres to work at Walmart is being penalized, paying their share to reduce carbon, but where is that money going to go? That's what the people in northern Ontario want to know.

The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound talked about how schools are being closed in his riding. Do you know why schools are being closed in his riding and why they're being closed in mine? Because this government is driving people out of rural Ontario by making life unbelievably unaffordable, with no return. That's why.

Again, this tax, if it's going to go to fixing the carbon, fine, but show us where it's going, because we don't see it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you to all those who spoke.

The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek was very gracious in his remarks and suggested that I offered some good information. I trust that's not because I'm wearing an orange shirt today, but it's truly genuine.

The member from Cambridge talked about school closures and school hubs. It's great to see that there's some opportunity for school hubs or community hubs, but at the end of the day, her government promised to review and fix the funding formula for two or three consecutive elections, and they haven't done that. That's a promise broken and not addressed in this budget.

The member from Whitby-Oshawa: I certainly appreciate that he brought up some good points in regard to seniors. Our seniors built this wonderful province. We need to ensure that what we're doing, going forward, is showing them the respect they deserve and ensuring that the programs and services they need are going to be there.

She said she was proud of the government's success so far. Well, then I'd ask her to go over to her associate minister and see if she can get me answers on why the 30,000 beds that they've committed to in two elections have not been built and where the plan is. When I've asked, I haven't even been able to get a copy of the plan of where and when those beds are going to be built. If she's that proud and she wants to stand strong, I would ask her to do that, and challenge her.

The member from Whitby-Oshawa also brought up agriculture. I want to use a quote, because the Minister of Finance said—and I'm going to quote from his little book:

"We grow and produce some of the world's greatest food ...

"Brew great beer and make amazing wine."

And yet, as he most effectively pointed out, they cut \$28 billion in this budget for agriculture. If we don't have

healthy food, if we don't have the ability to feed our families, the—

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: Sorry?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Million, not billion.

Mr. Bill Walker: Million, sorry. I correct my record if I said billion.

Food is absolutely fundamental, like health care, and we need that.

The member from Timiskaming-Cochrane, again, talked about all the things that we talk about all the time in rural Ontario: the costs to live in Ontario, that they're driving people out of rural Ontario. We want to see that that carbon tax is actually going to address the issue, not a slush fund to cover up their mismanagement, their incompetence and their overspending in the last 12 years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always an honour to stand on behalf of the residents of Windsor-Tecumseh to bring my voice to this provincial Parliament. It saddens me to say, however, that our area has the highest unemployment rate in the province. When I looked at the cover of the budget document, with the title Jobs for Today and Tomorrow, I expected the contents to include a blueprint or a map detailing where the jobs will come from so that the young people from my area who left to seek employment elsewhere could find their way back home and find a job, and our newest neighbours who immigrated from elsewhere could find suitable employment. Well, I'm still looking.

The news release that was issued when the budget was introduced called it "the next phase of the government's plan to create jobs and economic growth." I've said it before and I'll say it again: There is no shame in admitting to a mistake. Selling off the public shares in Hydro One is a major mistake. Some 80% of the people in this province don't want it done, 200 municipal councils have passed resolutions saying it shouldn't be done, and yet the Liberals are still following the misguided path.

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Not that long ago this afternoon, we heard the Minister of Transportation say they were listening to the people of Ontario. Clearly, they're not. They are committed to using their smoke-and-mirror term of "maximizing the value of government-owned assets." The problem with that scenario, of course, is that these are not government-owned assets. They don't belong to the Liberal Party of Ontario; they belong to the people of Ontario, the senior citizens of Ontario, the children of Ontario and the families of Ontario, and we don't want them sold. We want to protect our public assets for generations to come. The hydro distribution network was created for the public good, not for private profit—not for the benefit of the friends of the Liberal Party of Ontario.

The Financial Accountability Officer has already told all of us that over the long term, the sell-off of shares in Hydro One will cost all of us \$500 million, money that could have been spent on hospitals and schools, roads

and bridges, sewers, and by using the more traditional methods of paying for infrastructure projects instead of selling the public shares of Hydro One for the short-term goal of making the Liberal budget books appear just a little bit better. I say shame, shame, shame.

While we're playing the shame game, let's talk about this new budget and what it means to people with disabilities in this province. That will be a very short conversation because there's very little of any consequence in these 350 pages that deals in any way with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. In fact, one of the brightest guys I've ever met, David Lepofsky, just reminded me about that on Friday. The Liberals brought in the ODA more than 10 years ago and yet he says the act "has not made a significant difference in the lives of people with disabilities."

There are 1.8 million people in Ontario with a disability—nearly two million. The goal is for the province to be fully accessible by 2025. David Lepofsky has been practising law in Ontario for 35 years. He's one of the most recognized and respected disability activists in Canada, and when he speaks, the members of this chamber should be listening.

He called out the Liberals last week, saying, "Over 1.8 million Ontarians with a physical, mental, sensory, learning, intellectual or communication disability still face far too many unfair accessibility barriers every day, when they try to get a job, shop in stores, go to school or university, get health care services, find a place to live, eat in restaurants, use a taxi, public transit, or other public services, or deal with their municipal or provincial government."

David Lepofsky says the Liberals have no comprehensive plan to ensure that we will reach the 2025 goal of a barrier-free Ontario. The document, the so-called Jobs for Today and Tomorrow—that budget document is a snow job, not a jobs plan.

Let me remind you what a great Canadian once said. A man who recently served us as Ontario's Lieutenant Governor, David Onley, was speaking about the problems that people with disabilities have in finding suitable employment. Our former Lieutenant Governor said that massive disability unemployment isn't just a national crisis; it's a national shame.

Well, you can take those words to the bank. I wouldn't be taking this Jobs for Today and Tomorrow book to the bank unless it was a snow bank, because, as I said, it's more of a snow job pretending to be a blueprint for a better tomorrow. I guess you can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool most of us with this one.

Look, I'll be frank. There are a few good points in here. I give you that. Who can argue with free tuition? Who can argue with better palliative care and more money for hospices? When I was living in St. John's, Newfoundland, Premier Joey Smallwood—and I admit it was more than a few years ago. Joey, at the time, was the only living Father of Confederation. Newfoundland became part of Canada in 1949—as a matter of fact, on April 1. There's a joke there somewhere.

Anyway, until 1968, when I entered Memorial University, Joey had provided free tuition for everyone going to university in Newfoundland regardless of income levels—free tuition—because he knew Newfoundland had to grow its economy, to diversify from fishing and forestry and mining, and the way to do that was to set the conditions for an educated workforce, to stimulate their creativity, to encourage them to reach for the stars and to believe that they could become anything they ever dreamed about. Doctors, lawyers, scientists, artists—the world was the doorstep. You wouldn't recognize Newfoundland's economy today compared to what it was back in the 1950s and 1960s.

I will argue that free tuition for those generations of young Newfoundland students was a major reason for the dramatic turnaround, and I hope we can see similar results in Ontario. If so, we should be expanding the free-tuition offer to more young people in the years ahead.

Let me speak for a moment about the innovation-driven economy. Much has been made about the Liberal plan to grow research and development capacity and innovation technologies. We've heard of a \$35-million fund which will be spread over five years, and a new partnership in this so-called advanced manufacturing consortium. This new scheme will include three university campuses: McMaster, Waterloo and Western. Academics will partner with industry and focus on long-term industrial innovation projects. Okay, but they'll be playing catch-up to some extent because we've been doing that for some years now down in Windsor and Essex county. We've been active not only at the University of Windsor but at St. Clair College as well.

In fact, our mayor and others in the community are somewhat bewildered as to why this new technology corridor will stop in London. Much is being said in our community about this. The headline in the Windsor Star on the day following the budget was, "Budget Overlooks Windsor." That's because there's \$50 million in there for the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in Waterloo as they seek advances in information technology in areas such as quantum computing. There's a partnership fund of \$20 million to be spent over three years to better connect colleges and companies in Ontario with applied research projects. Journalists at the Star were compelled to highlight that the city was left out of a new \$100-million innovation super-corridor plan.

It's no secret that, for many years, folks in Windsor and Essex county have felt left out. We've heard our neighbours say that Ontario ends in London. I've heard that for more than 40 years. I'm not saying it's true, but there is a perception out there—and as you know, in politics, perception can soon become reality. I would hope not. I remember clearly a day after the last provincial election. The Premier was quoted as saying that she wouldn't forget about Windsor. I took her word then and I take her at her word today. It would be a shame to forget about the region in the province with the highest unemployment rate. Seriously, how could you ever expect to win a seat in that region again if you did focus

all of your spending on other parts of the province? It doesn't make sense.

Here's a quote from Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens, as reported in the Windsor Star on the budget: "I was disappointed that Windsor wasn't included in the consortium because I believe we have a lot to offer. In this city we have a huge manufacturing cluster that already exists. It's been our bread and butter in this community and we've got a world-class university right here."

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When asked for a comment by the Star, economic development, employment and infrastructure minister Brad Duguid said Windsor wasn't forgotten. The minister was quoted as saying, "Windsor has some really interesting and exciting advances being made in a lot of the automotive technology and it cannot be ignored—and it's not ignored—but the centre of the innovation hub in the central part of Ontario remains the Toronto-Waterloo corridor."

That Star story says that's where the 3D printing and digital components and devices will be developed, but even Mike Moffat, an economist at the Ivey Business School, was surprised that Windsor isn't recognized by this Liberal government as an innovation hub due to our proximity to Detroit and all the innovation we have developed within the automotive industry. So be it.

Minister Duguid has said, "We're not going to quit investing in Windsor—in infrastructure, in companies—until we get that unemployment down to an acceptable level." I will accept the minister at his word and I look forward to the day when we see some provincial announcements in that regard.

We all know there are great things happening in our region. Because the Premier and the minister have both said Windsor will not be forgotten, part of my role in opposition is to remind them of that promise and to hold them to account. So will people such as Brent McPhail, the president of Brave Control Solutions. His company was just ranked one of Canada's fastest-growing small businesses by the Profit 500 guide.

Not being included in the innovative corridor will hurt companies such as Brave Control Solutions from attracting new employees; that is one of the fears that Brent McPhail sees coming out of this Liberal snub. So to the minister: Allow me to extend an invitation to come down and speak to the Windsor and district chamber of commerce at your earliest opportunity. Chamber president and CEO Matt Marchand was quoted in the Windsor Star on Friday when speaking about this new corridor, saying, "You shouldn't write off the tech sector in Windsor. It is disappointing to see it excluded from this."

In case you missed it, in January, the unemployment rate in Windsor was 9.3%, so you can understand our sensitivity when it comes to job creation and future prospects for job creation in Windsor and Essex county.

Where else could this budget document have created jobs? Well, if the hare-brained scheme that eliminated our slots at Windsor Raceway and led to the collapse and

closure of the raceway—if that decision had been reversed, we could have seen 3,000 local jobs created as well as the construction jobs as we built the new track. I say to the Liberals that if you wanted to create jobs, that one idea should be a no-brainer.

You know, there are a ton of great ideas out there for job creation right across Ontario. Many of us met with representatives last week at the Ontario Good Roads Association and the Rural Ontario Municipal Association at their annual conference.

Thunder Bay would have liked to have seen more money in the budget for a number of things: dealing with marginalized people, more money for social services and more money for subsidized social housing in their community. Besides more money for roads, bridges and sewers, Mayor Keith Hobbs told us about the plans they have for their event and convention centre.

I think everyone in the chamber today has heard about the rat hole they have in Thunder Bay, their district jail. It's overcrowded, the working conditions are deplorable, and unless I missed it—I know you'll correct me if I have—there's nothing in there for the improvements that are needed at the Thunder Bay district jail. Most of the people incarcerated there are innocent. They haven't been convicted of anything yet. It's a disgrace, the conditions that they're forced to live in.

We learned from Thunder Bay about the 25 mines that are ready to roll if and when the Liberals ever get around to providing transportation links and hydro to the mine sites. I won't even mention the Ring of Fire, but if you hooked up the First Nations communities, the north would blossom.

Another thing this budget could have addressed for people in the north is a solution to the high cost of non-medical patient transfers being handled by EMS personnel. We in the south have other options and they are not as expensive, so why wouldn't the government have something in here to resolve that long-standing issue in the north?

The Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus told us about the poor cellular networks they have to deal with, where 16% of the residents have no cell coverage whatsoever. They also told us about the lack of reliable hydro service. They suggested a very affordable solution of bringing in power from Quebec. They gave us a heads-up that if hydro can't be made more reliable, we could see a major plant pulling out of Napanee because of the lack of reliable power.

Here's another heads-up: Bill 151, the so-called Waste-Free Ontario Act, with the aim of making producers more responsible for recycling their products. Municipal leaders have grown very tired of subsidizing the true cost of providing the blue box recycling service. They want to be consulted; they want to be at the table when the stewards discuss possible changes; they want their voices heard; and I'll tell you, you better be listening.

Whether you're aware of it or not, Vancouver just did something about it. They couldn't get the producers to

pay the true cost of the blue box. The politicians in Vancouver grew tired of the platitudes and the promises. They were using municipal tax dollars to pay 30% of the cost of recycling. So they just said, "The heck with it," and are turning the blue box program over to the producers. They're getting out of it altogether. If they're not going to get the true cost recovered from the producers for picking up the blue box and the recyclables, they're just not going to do it anymore for the people who should be looking at their own packaging and recycling.

That could happen in Ontario, believe it or not. Make no mistake about it: You either pay the municipality the full cost of providing the service or you'll be paying someone else to do it because they won't be doing it anymore.

Now, the government may listen to municipal voices, but it hasn't done a very good job of hearing what is being said because, I can tell you, those municipal voices want changes made. They're growing tired of the promises. They want to see real action, for a change, on a number of fronts.

The leaders of the Ontario Good Roads Association are still befuddled as to why this government can't even find a way to standardize a proper way of measuring the width of a road. You've heard them year after year, and you haven't done anything about it. That doesn't instill confidence in them that you care a hoot about what they have to say.

ROMA leaders want to see more money in the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund. This budget is trimming that fund from the areas where it is needed most. They're also looking to you for leadership on the power dams taxation issue, which could be a powder keg of resentment if you don't make sure municipal tax bases are protected. They also don't think you have a real plan for expanding natural gas into rural areas of Ontario. It's taking way too much time.

Eastern Ontario mayors want a change in the grant formulas: more attention to formula-based infrastructure money as opposed to application-based funding. They say you guys do a really terrible job of communicating why their grant applications have been unsuccessful. They are waiting for real change in the affordable housing field and will be greatly disappointed if you let them down again in that matter.

The wardens in western Ontario would have liked to see some support for their southwestern integrated fibre technology project. They're also worried that the proposed cap-and-trade bill will delay the expansion of natural gas lines into rural Ontario.

Speaker, I know I've used up most of my time this afternoon, but I want to thank you for your attention while I was speaking.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You're welcome. Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to spend a couple of minutes commenting on the member from Windsor-Tecumseh—a very good speaker, I must say.

He makes some valid points. The opposition needs to point out what more we can do, and he certainly handed out a full laundry list. I'm not sure how any government could afford those laundry lists, but I do comment because I think he understands some of the needs in his community.

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I'll comment on some of the comments that he brought forward from the Windsor Star this weekend. I didn't see them but I truly trust that's what he said. But he failed to mention some of the comments from the mayor of Tecumseh, the president of AMO. He certainly thought that the budget was a good budget. He forgot to mention it—I'm not sure if it was in the Windsor Star—but that's a comment he made. He was also president of AMO, but I know the member knows that.

I also understand the responsibility of the opposition. I get it, Speaker; I understand.

I had two post-budget get-togethers with the chambers of commerce: one, a breakfast in the west end of Cobourg, and then in Port Hope at the beautiful Railside Restaurant, with about 35 people attending. They had some questions, but in general I would say they were very supportive of the tuition piece for post-secondary education. They talked about the deficit; it's on everybody's mind, Speaker.

Mr. Bill Walker: They're okay with it?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: They are very supportive. They know what we went through but also that it's going to come to an end, Speaker.

The municipality he talked about: not happy. I know that every mayor I spoke to on the \$300-million Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund was very supportive. That's what they were asking for, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: This budget is more about big debt and deficits than anything else. I don't think we can forget the harsh reality that \$308 billion of debt means that Ontario is the most indebted subnational state in the world. And we're in deficit, so the debt continues to grow. This is \$23,000 for every man, woman and child in the province of Ontario, at a time when our economy is faltering and when we have high unemployment, and yet the government continues to spend.

They think they've made a great achievement by keeping the deficit, which means they're spending more than they bring in, down to \$4.3 billion. They only did this with extraordinary one-time measures: \$850 million from the contingency fund, which was \$1 billion—they raided the rainy-day chest, so we can't fix whatever might happen next year if it's a surprise; \$2.6 billion from a one-time tax on the sale of hydro; and an additional \$1 billion from the sale of Hydro One itself.

We have the most expensive hydro in North America. It's driving industry out of our province. It is impoverishing people in our province like senior citizens and people who are on a limited income.

Next year, they tell us they're going to balance the budget and we will have no deficit. Then, at the same time, we realize they're expecting \$1.9 billion of new income from the cap-and-trade tax, which will come from the same people who are paying the hydro bills and the same ones who are going to pay for the pension plan, which is a payroll tax. Mr. Speaker, we can't afford this government to continue to spend. They're bankrupting the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I listened to the member from Tecumseh. It reminded me of a question I was asked last Friday in regard to the budget by one of our local media. He said, "How can you best describe this budget?" I said, "It's a Liberal budget. It's the best way I could describe it. It's all about smoke and mirrors, and everybody look over here as we mess this up over there."

If you look at item after item in the budget, it's quite telling. The government on the one hand says, "Oh, good news: People are not going to have to pay any tuition if their family income is under \$50,000 a year." They don't say that everybody still has to pay the first \$3,000 no matter what. And they don't talk about there being a whole bunch of people who make more than \$50,000 a year as family income who are not going to qualify for this program whatsoever. Plus you lose your tax credit. So for a lot of people, it actually means you'll be paying more.

The government announced—how many budgets ago?—the Ring of Fire. They were going to fix the Ring of Fire. We were going to get economic development going up in Marten Falls and Webequie and all those points in between. We were going to put \$1 billion they promised three budgets ago. They announced it again in this one. At what point does this government have no shame for reannouncing something for the third or fourth time that you haven't done yet? If the government would have done what they were supposed to do with the Ring of Fire seven or eight years ago, we'd be in a process of building a chromite mine up in the Ring of Fire. Instead, these guys are really good at making announcements and making it look as if they're doing something, but in fact are doing the opposite.

The ultimate is the cap-and-trade system. I'm in favour of some form of mechanism by which we can diminish greenhouse gases, and if you can come up with a good cap-and-trade, I can support that. But this is about shifting money into general revenue and making the working stiff pay for it by all kinds of means.

I think, quite frankly, the government would do well to listen to what the committee says when that bill goes into committee, and make some changes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment. I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you. I'm pleased to respond to the comments on the budget from the member from Windsor—Tecumseh.

I was a little bit surprised that you characterized the community attitude to the budget, because quite frankly, I think there is some opportunity here for Windsor in the budget. Like you, I come from a university town. I have heard nothing but positive comments over the weekend from the students that I talked to, through to the administrators and faculty members. There has been a really positive reaction to the free tuition for low-income families.

When I look at university enrolment numbers, what I see is that for southern Ontario universities, the University of Windsor has had the highest enrolment drop of any southern Ontario university. To me, that's related to income, which means that families in Windsor aren't able to have their students go. We know that there have been pressures in Windsor in terms of employment and struggling with the economy in the Windsor area. We are actually helping your families who have lower income.

If you get up to \$50,000, average tuition will be free. If you go to \$83,000, about half the kids will get it free. You're up to double \$83,000 before you get nothing. This is a graduated program, so this helps a broad range of family incomes.

I think that this will be a real boon to families in the Windsor—Tecumseh area who need a little bit of extra help to make sure that their kids can get access to the post-secondary education that's going to allow them to get jobs in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for questions and comments. We return to the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you to everyone who made comments on what I had to say.

Let me, if I could, turn my attention for a moment to my good friend from Northumberland—Quinte West when he talked about the president of AMO—a very good friend of mine—Gary McNamara. Gary has been president for a while. He was president before I was his vice-president, the first time around when he was president at AMO. I was chair of the Large Urban Caucus.

What I wanted to mention to the minister—we all know Gary. They had a lot of chuckles at the ROMA/Good Roads conference—I won't embarrass the minister; I won't say who it was—because one of your ministers who addressed that conference talked about his good friend "Jerry." He didn't call Gary "Jerry" once. He didn't call Gary "Jerry" twice. He called Gary "Jerry" three times during his address. It caused great delight to the delegates who were there. Gary didn't think it was all that funny, but the other people there did.

Anyway, I just mentioned that because you had to mention my good friend—our good friend—Gary McNamara.

I'll say, to the education minister, thank you for those comments. I was quoting the newspaper the day after the budget. In today or tomorrow's Windsor Star, at least in the digital version, the president of the University of Windsor, Alan Wildeman, is downplaying and putting cold water on that criticism about Windsor not being included in the technology corridor, saying not to worry

about it: "Other universities didn't complain when we got stuff in the past, and we're not going to complain about it now." I wasn't quoting university people; I was quoting people in our community who had a lot to say in the front page, in the headline, in the Windsor Star.

Having said that—I guess I am out of time again. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
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Joe Dickson, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Sophie Kiwala
Jim McDonell, Eleanor McMahon
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przedziecki

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Cristina Martins
Robert Bailey, Vic Dhillon
John Fraser, Wayne Gates
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
Cristina Martins, Randy Pettapiece
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przedziecki

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Bob Delaney
Randy Hillier, Michael Mantha
Cristina Martins, Indira Naidoo-Harris
Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qadri
Laurie Scott
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**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jack MacLaren
Granville Anderson, Bas Balkissoon
Chris Ballard, Steve Clark
Jack MacLaren, Michael Mantha
Eleanor McMahon, Monte McNaughton
Soo Wong
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**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Han Dong, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Julia Munro, Arthur Potts
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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Daiene Vernile, Bill Walker
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Jagmeet Singh, Peter Tabuns
Glenn Thibeault
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